A LAD OF GRIT

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A Story of Adventure on Land and Sea in Restoration Times

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"INCH BY INCH THEY WERE DRIVEN BACK"

A Lad of Grit

A Story of Adventure on Land and Sea in Restoration Times

by
PERCY F. WESTERMAN

ILLUSTRATED BY EDWARD S. HODGSON

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By Percy F. Westerman

Captain Fosdyke's Gold.
In Defiance of the Ban.
Captain Sang.
The Senior Cadet.
The Amir's Ruby.
The Secret of the Plateau.
Leslie Dexter, Cadet.
All Hands to the Boats.
A Mystery of the Broads.
Rivals of the Reef.
A Shanghai Adventure.
Pat Stobart in the "Golden Dawn".
The Junior Cadet.
Captain Starlight.
The Sea-Girt Fortress.
On the Wings of the Wind.

Captured at Tripoli.
Captain Blundell's Treasure.
The Third Officer.
Unconquered Wings.
The Riddle of the Air.
Chums of the "Golden Vanity".
Clipped Wings.
The Luck of the "Golden Dawn".
The Salving of the "Fusi Yama".
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The Quest of the "Golden Hope".
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Sea Scouts Up-Channel.
The Wireless Officer.
A Lad of Grit.
The Submarine Hunters.
Sea Scouts All.
The Thick of the Fray.
A Sub and a Submarine.
Under the White Ensign.
The Fight for Constantinople.
With Beatty off Jutland.
The Dispatch Riders.

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Inch by inch they were driven back. . . . . Frontispiece
I ran at my father's murderer and rained blow after blow upon his head and body
They clambered up our sides with the greatest intrepidity
The chest is hoisted to the surface

CHAPTER I--How the Tidings of the Restoration Came to Rake

The sun was slowly sinking behind the tree-clad Hampshire Downs. Already the long shadows of Rake Hill lay athwart the misty coombe, and the glimmer of the innumerable forges in the valley beneath began to hold its own against the rapidly fading daylight. The cold east wind, for it was but the beginning of March, in the year of grace 1660, whistled through the clump of gaunt pine trees that marked

the summit of the hill, and, despite the fact that each of us wore a thick doublet, the chilly blast cut us like a knife.

I remember that evening well; its stirring incidents are graven on my memory as if they had happened but yesterday, though nigh on twoscore and ten winters and summers have passed over my head since the eventful year of which I write.

My father and I were returning homewards from the great fair at Petersfield. For an old man, he being well over sixty years of age, my father was the marvel of our village. Tall but sparely built, his frame betokened a strength of body that harmonized with the determination of character that made itself known by the glance of his steel-coloured eyes. Report says that when he came to Rake to settle down, some twelve or thirteen years back--I being but an infant in arms,--he did gain a lasting reputation by outmatching one Caleb James, a notorious bully, at his own game, breaking his pate with his own staff on the roadside hard by Milland Church.

Moreover, as proof of his hardiness, is there not the testimony of the worthy Master Hugh Salesbury, the chirurgeon of Lyss--the same whose son fell in Torrington's action off Beachy Head,--to the effect that though practice was slack around Lyss, yet he perforce would have to give up if none were better patients than honest Owen Wentworth.

Despite the fact that he was on the losing side, my father was not backward in declaring his attachment to His Gracious Majesty King Charles II; and although our neighbours, even the Roundheads, were favourably disposed to him, making allowance for his fiery temper, yet with strangers who passed along the great highway betwixt London Town and Portsmouth, honest Owen's outspoken declarations oft led to wordy strife, and on occasions ended in blows.

In defiance of the Puritan regulations against anything tending towards the lost cause, my father, though ruined by confiscations and sequestration, endeavoured to maintain the appearance of a careless and social demeanour, ever cherishing a hope that each day seemed nearer fulfilment.

He still retained his flowing lovelocks, while the lower part of his weather-worn face was adorned by a greyish beard of Van Dyck cut, which failed to hide a portion of a long, whitish scar that extended from his left eyebrow to his cheek bone--the legacy of a pike-thrust in the sanguinary encounter of Cropredy Bridge. He was dressed in a dark-blue suit, relieved by a deep collar of Mechlin lace, while, on account of the severity of the weather, he was further attired in a long cloak that barely concealed the end of a short hanger--a necessary weapon in these troublous times. I also knew that he carried two long dags, or Scottish pistols, yet of these there was no outward sign.

As we neared the foot of the hill, instead of turning to the right towards our

home, my father broke the silence by saying:

"I will call in at the 'Flying Bull'. Possibly the chapman from Godalming is there. If so, I can replenish my stock of gun flints."

As we entered the doorway of the "Flying Bull"--an old hostelry that has sheltered all sorts and conditions of men, from kings and queens even to the arch-traitor Old Noll himself, and the sign of which, painted by a limner who had learned his art in the time of the last crusade, had swung in the breeze for nigh on four hundred years--we were greeted with a chorus of welcome from the score or so of persons assembled in the large stone-flagged common room.

"How goes the price of malt and barley at Petersfield?" questioned one man in a voice that was like to the bellowing of a bull.

"Man," retorted another, "doth thy reasoning not rise above the price of petty huckstering, Obadiah Blow-the-trumpet-in-Zion? Heed him not, good Master Wentworth. Hast news of honest George Monk and his army?"

"None, though rumour hath it that the fleet at Portsmouth hath sided with Monk, and that John Tippets, the mayor, hath called out the train bands and manned the ordnance on the Platform and the Square Tower. Moreover, a trusty messenger hath reached Sir Giles Seaward with orders to raise the countryside and to assemble in Petersfield marketplace to-morrow at noon. God forfend that this land be not again drenched in blood!"

"Ay," rejoined another, "but, as man to man, Master Wentworth, what think ye? How blows the wind in London?" he added darkly.

"My friend, mark ye well, the wind blows straight from the Low Country."

"No," thundered a voice from a seat in the chimney corner; "the blast of the Lord, that destroyed Sennacherib and his host, will utterly consume the malignants, including Charles Stuart, the son of the enemy of the people of England!" My father sprang to his feet, white with fury. All eyes were centred on the speaker. He was a short, thick-set man of about forty years of age, with a bull-neck, huge ears, small ferrety eyes, close-cropped hair, and a clean-shaven face deeply pitted with smallpox. He wore a buff-coloured jerkin, opened at the neck for comfort's sake, and frayed and soiled from the wearing of armour, his breast- and back-plates of dull steel having been removed. These, together with a steel helmet with metal guards, and a heavy broadsword, lay on the settle within arm's length, while a petronel and a well-weighted bandolier hung across the back of a chair on which the man's feet, encased in long Spanish boots, rested.

On my father striding across the room, the stranger leisurely rose from his seat and extended his hand in an attitude of contemptuous reproof.

"Tut, man, 'tis time thy grey hairs taught thee wisdom! Wouldst threaten me, Increase Joyce, trooper of Parliamentary Horse?"

"Draw, knave, draw!" shouted my father, whipping out his hanger. "Either

unsay those words or else swallow them!"

Instantly all was confusion. Some of the more timid made towards the door, tables were overturned, tankards clattered on the floor, excited men shouted in unintelligible voices. For my own part, I remained by my father's side, unable to take my eyes off his antagonist, and, at the same time, knowing that my father in his choler would brook no interference from me.

"I fight not with old men," retorted Joyce. "But this I know: 'The axe is laid unto the root of the trees', an' if that arch-profligate, Charles Stuart, were to set foot in England----"

He was interrupted by a violent knocking at the door, which, being thrown wide open, showed a man fully armed and holding the reins of a steaming and apparently exhausted horse.

"Host!" he shouted. "Where or which is the host?"

Old Giles Perrin, the innkeeper, came forward and awaited his commands.

"Now, sirrah, on thy life, hasten! Provender for my beast; a cup of spiced ale for myself. With all dispatch, man, for I am on the service of the State!"

The stranger strode into the room, stooped and replaced one of the overturned stools, seated himself thereon, and, removing a cloth that encircled his neck, wiped his heated brow vigorously. Then he stared haughtily around at the assembled company, seized the cup that old Giles brought, and drained it at one gulp.

I remarked that he spoke with an accent totally different from the Southern dialect of our part of Hampshire and Sussex, but my doubts were soon set at rest.

"How far down yon road is't to Petersfield? And is one like to meet aught of footpads, drawlatches, or vagrants of that condition?"

It was my father who answered him, yet barely had he opened his mouth when the stranger clapped him on the shoulder:

"By all the powers of darkness! You, S----"

"Hold, man!" replied my father in a tone that implied no denial. Then, in an undertone, I heard him say: "I am now but Owen Wentworth, gentleman yeoman, at your service."

"I am still Ralph Slingsby, though, thanks to my General Monk, cornet of horse no longer, but captain in his favourite regiment. Let me think. 'Tis but thrice that I have seen thee since we parted at Holwick, you to join the king at Nottingham, I to enrol under my Lord Essex. First, at Edgehill, when I, a mere stripling, lay under the hoofs of Rupert's horse. Secondly, at Cropredy Bridge, when I did turn aside the pike that would have let your soul out of the keeping of your body. Lastly, when at the trial of----"

"Ssh! I would have you remember that the rising generation hath long ears."

My father spoke truly, for though the stranger had uttered his lengthy

speech but in an undertone, yet I, with the curiosity of youth, did not fail to hear, much to my mystification. Knowing also that the remark about "the rising generation" was applied to me, I must needs raise my hands to my ears to feel if they were long, much to Ralph Slingsby's amusement.

"So this is your son, Master Wentworth? A fitting chip of the old block! What wouldst thou be, lad; a fighting man, like thy sire?"

"Ay," I replied. "But I would love to go to sea, and become famous like Admiral Blake, e'en though he were a Roundhead!"

"What knowest thou of Blake?"

"Henry Martin hath told me tales of his gallant deeds, and besides, he hath shown me his medal of bronze, inscribed: 'For eminent service in saving ye *Triumph*, fired in fight with ye Dutch'. That was the sea fight in which Martin lost his leg."

"Ah, Master Wentworth, that's the spirit I like! The time hath come when Englishmen cease from flying at each other's throats. Host, my score!"

Then, shaking my father by the hand, and patting me kindly on the head, he strode towards the door; then, turning, he addressed the company:

"Gentlemen, I beg you take heed that yesternight a messenger was sent to Holland to invite His Majesty King Charles II to return to his throne. I bear orders to the fleet at Portsmouth that they all, with the exception of the *Naseby*, the name of which giveth offence to His Majesty, proceed to the Downs, there to welcome our sovereign lord. God save the King!"

While the silence that prevailed in the room, following on this startling announcement, still remained, I could hear the thud of horse's hoofs as Ralph Slingsby resumed his momentous journey towards Petersfield.

When, a quarter of an hour or so later, we left the "Flying Bull", the moon had risen, throwing the long shadows of the dark pines athwart the road. Our humble abode lay about a mile on the by-road from Rake to Midhurst, and homewards we stepped, our thick-soled shoes ringing on the frosty road. When but half the distance was covered, I heard the sound of the crackling of the dry brushwood in a coppice on our left, followed by the cry of a bird and the fluttering of its wings as it flew over our heads.

Instinctively I edged closer to my father and grasped his left hand.

"Lad, art afraid of a fox running through the covert?" he exclaimed. "And wouldst be a sailor, too!"

In spite of my boast in the well-lit room of the "Flying Bull", my heart throbbed painfully, and my reply seemed like to stick in my throat. We continued in silence, and presently came to a spot where a large reed-fringed lake lay on the right-hand side of the road, while on the other a dense clump of gaunt firs threw a dismal gloom over our path.

As we neared the clump a voice, authoritative, harsh, and yet familiar, shouted:

"Stand!"

And into the moonlight stepped a short, thick-set man, whom I recognized as the soldier who caused the turmoil at the inn, Increase Joyce.

For the second time that night my father unsheathed his hanger, and, pushing me behind him, advanced towards the man.

"Stand!" he repeated. "See here; a word in thine ear, Master Wentworth. Less than an hour agone I said: 'I fight not with old men'. I recall those words. With me it is a case of doing in Rome as do the Romans. The Commonwealth is at an end, therefore I am a Parliamentarian no longer. Instead, I journey to the Rhine to join the German freebooters, or else to the Spanish Main to throw in my lot with the buccaneers of the Indies--it matters not which; but ere I go I have an account to settle with the Lord of Holwick. Little did I think to find him hiding in an obscure Sussex village. Dost remember twenty years aback--the trysting place under the Holmwood Oak?--Ah! ... Nay! Stand, at thy peril!"

But my father, white with passion, still advanced, the moonbeams dancing on his glittering blade. Joyce unslung his petronel, and covered his antagonist when within fifteen or twenty paces.

"Murderer!" shouted my father.

"As you will; I take no risks with steel," and immediately the report of the weapon burst upon my ears like a clap of thunder, while the trees were illuminated by the flash of the discharge. I shut my eyes and screamed in terror, and on opening them I saw--oh, merciful Heaven!--a convulsive form lying in the road, while the Roundhead stood watching me intently, the smoke from his petronel hanging round like a pall, and slowly ascending in the chill night air.

In an instant my terror left me and I became a demon. Grasping my oak cudgel in my hand, I ran at my father's murderer and rained blow after blow upon his head and body. It was but a forlorn attempt. His headpiece and armour received the blows as lightly as if they were from a straw, and with an oath he smote me heavily on the chest with the butt of his pistol, so that I reeled, fell backward across the body of my murdered sire, and struck my head on the frosty road. Multitudes of lights flashed before my eyes, followed by a red glare, and I lost all consciousness.

[image]

"I RAN AT MY FATHER'S MURDERER AND RAINED BLOW AFTER BLOW UPON HIS HEAD AND BODY"

CHAPTER II--Of the Arrest and Escape of Increase Joyce

When I came to, the first vague impressions of consciousness were the excited chatterings of what seemed to me a multitude of people. Then I saw the flashing of the light of a log fire lightening the dark oak beams of a room. I lay still, my temples throbbing like to burst, and my head swimming till I felt ready to vomit. Trying to collect my thoughts, I realized that I was in the kitchen of our own house. Then in an instant the whole scene of the tragedy in the pine-shrouded lane burst upon me in all its horror, and I raised myself on one elbow and feebly articulated: "Father, say it is but a dream!"

Gentle hands firmly put my head back upon a pillow, and a voice, which I recognized as that of Master Salesbury, the chirurgeon, said: "The lad will surely recover. No more letting of blood or cupping is needful. A hot posset will not come amiss, good Mistress Heatherington, ere I take my leave, for 'tis cold abroad."

"Thou art right, Master Salesbury," replied another, Sir George Lee, who, I afterwards found out, had been summoned as a Justice of the Peace to take down such evidence as could be obtained. "And as for you, sir, I must ask you to accompany me as my guest till this unfortunate matter can fully be gone into."

"Right gladly would I, worthy sir, but I ride hot-foot on affairs of State. By ten of the clock I must deliver a sealed packet into the hands of Master Jack Tippets, the Mayor of Portsmouth."

I started, and strove again to rise; the voice seemed but too familiar to my ears; but once more I was soothed into repose.

"To Portsmouth, say you? Then why, may I ask, were you so far from the highway?"

"I had also to summon the Squire of Trotton----"

"Trotton, say you? Then why didst take this road, seeing that the turning at Milland is the right and proper one?" demanded Sir George sternly.

"I must have missed the right road, and, hearing shots, I suspected some foul crime, and rode hither----"

In an instant I connected that voice with that of the murderer, Increase Joyce, and with what strength yet remained I shouted: "Seize him; he is my father's murderer!"

Immediately all was commotion. Women shrieked--men shouted. Sir George Lee sprang to his feet and whipped out his sword. "Arrest him," he ordered. Two men, who were attendants at the Court Leet, placed their hands on Joyce's shoulder.

"Unhand me, men!" he exclaimed; "'tis a mistake--a grave mistake. Would ye pay heed to the ravings of a light-headed child?"

A wave of indecision swept over the people present; but, in spite of extreme physical pain, I had raised myself on my elbow, and in reply I repudiated the Roundhead's taunt. "I am not light-headed nor is it a mistake. That man shot my father with a petronel not a furlong from this house."

But Joyce doggedly followed up his line of argument. "Look, worthy sir," he reiterated, "the lad is still wandering. Why, when I came upon them, the boy was stretched senseless on the roadway. I pray you, order your men to release me. I journey on the business of the Commonwealth."

The two men released their hold, but Sir George turned on them with a rage quite unusual to him. "Were ye told to unhand him, dolts?" he shouted. "A messenger of the Commonwealth or no messenger, I take the responsibility. Bind him, and away to Midhurst with him at once."

With an oath the scoundrel shook off his two captors and threw himself bodily on Sir George. Taken unawares, the knight could ill defend himself, and before the bystanders could interfere, a knife flashed in the firelight and was buried in his body. Then the two henchmen grappled with the Roundhead, and all three rolled in a heap on the floor. It was not until the miscreant was stunned by a blow from a milking stool that he was finally secured, and attention could be given to Sir George Lee.

The knight was leaning against the wall, his head slightly bent, while a deadly pallor overspread his face, on which, however, lurked a peculiarly grim smile.

"Art hurt, Sir George?" asked Master Salesbury.

"Nay, Doctor, 'tis not a case for your hands this time, thanks to Lawyer Whitehead; I am but winded."

"To Lawyer Whitehead! How?"

"Ay, to Lawyer Whitehead! 'Tis the first time in twenty-nine years that I have been well served by a lawyer, and even this once it was not as a deliberate act of kindness." And, drawing from his pocket a thick bundle of parchment, partly

cut through by the villain's knife, he held it up for inspection.

At that moment the door opened and a sturdy countryman entered, pulling his forelock as a mark of respect to Sir George, and handed him a petronel which I recognized only too well.

"Zure, sir, I did find 'e but d'ree paces from t' road where they killed Maister Wentworth."

Under guard, the villain, now in a half-dazed condition, was removed in a cart to the jail at Midhurst. Most of those present dispersed, and, faint and tired, I fell into a troubled sleep.

A week passed ere I had sufficient strength to be able to sit up. Under the careful nursing of Mistress Heatherington my bodily hurts were healed, though the mental anguish of that terrible night still gripped me in a relentless grasp.

It was on a Tuesday morning when Sir George came to the cottage to enquire how I progressed, and to tell me that he was taking me to the courthouse at Midhurst on the following Monday morning, should I be well enough to bear the journey.

"Lad," he exclaimed, "I would I could fathom this mystery! Thy father's slayer is no mean reaver or cutpurse; yet, though we have him safe by the heels, manacled and leg-ironed, and threaten him with the thumbscrews, never a word can be wrung from him. Was there ever a feud 'twixt thy sire and him?"

I told the knight of the event that took place at the sign of the "Flying Bull", and of the meeting with the villain in the moonlit lane. Sir George listened attentively, and, proud of being privileged to talk to so exalted a personage as the wealthiest man for miles around Rake, I let my tongue run wild for the space of nigh on an hour.

When I had finished, Sir George, who had never ceased to stroke his beard and play a tattoo with his fingers on the table, remained silent for a few minutes; then suddenly he exclaimed:

"Holwick! Captain Slingsby of Monk's Regiment of Horse! 'Tis passing strange, yet----"

His remarks were cut short by the thunder of a horse's hoofs, and a man suddenly burst in through the door and exclaimed breathlessly: "Oh, Sir George! Sir George!"

"Well, sirrah?"

But the man could only stammer out: "Oh, Sir George!"

This was more than the choleric old knight could stand. "Don't stand there babbling like a drunken mummer at Martinmas fair!" he shouted, with a round oath. "Deliver thy message, dolt!"

"Oh, Sir George! The murderer Joyce hath escaped!"

With another furious outburst the knight rushed out of the room, mounted

his horse, and, followed by his two servants and the messenger of ill-tidings, rode furiously down the road to Midhurst, the noise of the horses' hoofs clattering on the frosty road testifying to the speed at which they were urged.

News travels apace, and in less than an hour it was all over our village that Joyce had by some means obtained a file, cut through his fetters, and, after a murderous attack on his jailer, had broken out of Midhurst Jail, and was last seen making his way towards the bleak Sussex Downs.

My father had already been laid to rest in the quiet little churchyard of Trotton, and on making an examination of the little house where we dwelt, his will was discovered. The reading of this will, though of little interest to me (on account, I now suppose, of my youth), was the occasion of an assembly of many of the friends of my father, the number surprising me; for, though highly respected, he was not one who was fond of associating with our neighbours.

There were present, besides Sir George Lee, who appeared to take a great interest in me, Lawyer Whitehead, Howard Hobbs and Jack Alexander of Iping, both of whom had seen service under Prince Rupert; Arthur Conolly, an Irish veteran who had served in the Low Countries, and who had come over from Chichester for the occasion; Arthur Lewis, a gentleman of Bramshott; Percy Young, an officer of the navy, who in his earlier days had lost a leg in the action of La Rochelle; Herbert Collings, a master mariner of Gosport, who used to be a frequent visitor at our house, and who greatly interested me with the account of his adventures off the coast of Barbary; and Giles Perrin, the landlord of the "Flying Bull", who modestly seated himself on a stool in a remote corner of the room. There were also several others whose names I forget.

Lawyer Whitehead, whose name did not belie his appearance, adjusted his horn spectacles, and, unfolding a parchment, read the will, which is as follows:--

"In the Name of God, Amen, I, Owen Wentworth, late of Holwick in the countie of Yorks" [here followed some word that had been erased and "yeoman" written above] "being whole of bodie and perfect of mynde, do ordaine and make this my last will and testament in manner and forme followinge: First, I commend my soule into the handes of Almightie God my Creator, and my bodie to be buried in the churchyarde at Trotton. Item, I give to the poor of the parish of Rake ten pounds to be divided amongst them by the discretion of my Executors. Item, I give to Sir George Lee, knight, in token of friendship, my horse, alsoe a box and contents now deposited with Master Whitehead, Lawyer of Midhurst. Item, to my sister Margaret, now wedded to George Anderson, Clerk of Ye Survey at the Dockyarde neare Portesmouth, One hundred Pounds. Item, to the said George Anderson the sum of Twenty and five Pounds yearly, provided that the

said George Anderson doth fulfil to the letter the instructions set forth by me and intrusted to the keeping of the aforesaid Master Whitehead, Lawyer of Midhurst.

"Item, to all persons hereinafter named" [here followed a long list of names, embracing all present and many besides], "provided that they pay me the last respects due to me, I give XX*s*. Item, to John Alexander and Arthur Lewis, my welbeloved friends and Executors, I give Five Pounds apiece.

"Item, to my deerly beloved sonne Aubrey I give the residue of my estate, to be held in trust by the aforesaid George Anderson till my sonne attain the age of XXI yeares, if he doe so long live.

"It is my will alsoe that my sonne Aubrey shall take charge and have and hold the metal box that I do always carry attached to my belt, suffering not the same to go out of hys possession, so that it will help in a small matter whereof he knoweth not yet.

"Item, it is my will if the above named Aubrey my sonne doth dye without heires or before he come to the age of XXI years, the residue shall remain to my sister Margaret Anderson and her heires forever."

There was a buzz of suppressed excitement when Master Whitehead had ended the reading of this lengthy will. Clearly my father was a far richer man than most people had wot of; moreover, there was a cloud of mystery hanging over the will--that was evident by the darkly worded passage about keeping the instructions.

But before there was time for discussion the lawyer brought out another bulky packet, fastened with a large red seal. This he broke and withdrew the contents, revealing yet another sealed missive and a sheet of vellum written in my father's hand. The missive was addressed: "In trust for my sonne Aubrey Wentworth. To Master George Anderson, dwelling in St. Thomas Street in Ye Burrough of Portesmouth. Not to be opened under paine of my displeasure till my sonne attaine the age of XXI years."

The letter gave instructions for me to be sent to my uncle's at Portsmouth, to be provided for until I could choose for myself what I should be, at the same time exhorting me to serve faithfully His Majesty King Charles II or his lawful successor, and to abstain from vain or idle longings to break the seals of the enclosed package till the stipulated time limit had expired.

This the lawyer gravely handed to me, expressing his satisfaction at the prospect before me--a statement that left me more bewildered than before.

Then Sir George Lee spoke, enquiring where was the small metal box that my father had mentioned.

Here was another mystery. No one knew or had seen the box. Mistress Heatherington and both the servants, Giles and William, who had brought home the body of my murdered sire, had been ignorant of its existence, and, at the request of Lawyer Whitehead, the clothes my father wore at the time of his death were produced. There was the belt--a highly ornamented broad band of Spanish leather. The lawyer took and examined it, then passed it on to Sir George, who also looked at it closely, even bending and shaking it in the hope that the missing box might be hidden between the layers of leather.

"Ah, what has been here?" exclaimed the knight, pointing to a series of minute holes round a patch of leather that was not quite so discoloured as the rest.

Clearly the mysterious box was missing, and it was evident that it had been forced away from the leathern belt. Then arose the question, how could it have been detached, and who was the miscreant who had taken it?

The debate lasted for a long while, but all present were agreed that the villain Joyce must have annexed it for some particular motive, though 'twas evident that robbery was not intended, the box being of some worthless metal.

Master Whitehead then gave to Sir George an oaken box which my father had mentioned in his will. The knight opened it, disclosing a lace handkerchief marked with a deep brown stain, to which was fastened a piece of parchment inscribed: "Stained with y^e blood of y^e Martyr His M^tie King Charles", the jewelled hilt of a sword, a ring, and several papers.

The knight reverently pressed his lips to the royal relic, then proceeded to peruse the various papers. The first he looked at intently for some moments, then read aloud the following words:--

"To Beverley Gate on fir trees that wall keeping from y^e 11J feete come to of mine directions in desires I sonne having."

Again he read these unmeaning words, his brows knitting in undisguised perplexity; then he handed the paper to the lawyer, who, after several vain attempts to produce a proper sentence, turned it over in his hand. Something was written on the back; but without saying a word he returned the paper to Sir George, first tapping the writing with his forefinger and clearly indicating that the knight should likewise keep silence.

My sharp wits clearly told me that Sir George by his manner was angry with himself for having read the paper aloud. Hastily thrusting it back into the box, he slammed to the lid and prepared to take his departure.

The rest of the assembled company followed his example, and, with an arm aching with the result of vigorous handshakes, I was left alone with Mistress Heatherington.

It was the last I saw of kind Sir George Lee for many a long year.

CHAPTER III--Concerning my Journey to Portsmouth

Grief does not for long hold its sway over the buoyant spirit of youth, and, in spite of the heavy blow that I had sustained, my boyish disposition speedily reasserted itself, and I looked forward with undisguised eagerness to my journey to my new home in Portsmouth town.

Already I had heard many wondrous tales of the happenings in that town from the lips of old Master Herbert Collings and of Henry Martin. In my mind I pictured my worthy uncle taking me round the dockyard, showing me this and that vessel, and pointing out this captain who fought against the Dutch, and that master mariner who repulsed the Barbary corsair.

With bright visions of the future I gave little heed to the troubles of the past, and eagerly wished for the end of the nine long days that must pass ere I left the quiet of our little village of Rake for the busy life of a naval town.

A day spent in Midhurst, where I was well fitted out with clothes, helped to make the time pass, and on the evening previous to the eventful day of my departure, I climbed the steep ascent of Rake Hill to bid farewell to some of my friends who dwelt on the by-road towards Lyss.

It was dark ere I set out homewards, and on the summit of the hill I stopped to look across the coombe, where flickered the innumerable wood fires of the iron smelters' forges. It reminded me strangely of that eventful day, but a few weeks past, when I journeyed over the selfsame road with my father, and instinctively I breathed a prayer for vengeance against his foul murderer.

Suddenly the distant thud of horses' hoofs smote upon my ear, and before I reached the foot of the hill, where stands the "Flying Bull", I perceived a cavalcade rapidly approaching.

As I drew to the side of the highway to watch them pass, I could see in the starlight that there was a body of horse, some dozen at least, surrounding a carriage. The horsemen were accoutred in breast- and back-plates and steel

helmets, and from their sour visages I knew them to be Roundheads. Inside the carriage a candlelamp burned, throwing a dim light on the occupants; and, brief as was my glimpse, I saw that they were lavishly attired, and wore lovelocks under their plumed beaver hats.

Whether they journeyed as prisoners I could not tell, though from the careless jovial expression of their faces it seemed otherwise; but before I could remark much else the party had galloped past, and were well on their way along this southern highway towards Portsmouth. When I reached my home I at once retired for the night, and was soon dreaming of horsemen and chariots till the rays of the morning sun, thrown athwart my bed, awoke me.

In my eagerness to start I could scarcely be persuaded to eat anything. In vain did Mistress Heatherington coax me--my excitement was too great. At length the two-horsed wain belonging to Farmer Hill drew up outside our house. By this conveyance I was to be taken to Petersfield, there to proceed by a chapman's cart that journeyed thrice weekly betwixt that town and Portsmouth.

My packages and boxes were lifted into the wagon. I climbed up beside the driver, and with many a handwave my old home was left behind me, and a new world lay before me.

I was now fourteen years of age, and for a country-bred lad I flattered myself that I was no fool. Tall for my age, broad-shouldered and supple-limbed, I possessed an unusual amount of strength, and could bear fatigue in a manner that could only be accounted for by the fact that I had led an active outdoor life.

Slowly the wagon ascended the steep incline of Rake Hill. The summit gained, there was time for a parting glance across the coombe ere the four-mile stretch of downhill road commenced. At first I talked excitedly with the driver, a sour-faced, wizened man, whose short jerky answers, spoken in broadest Sussex, did not encourage conversation; so presently I dropped all attempt at talking, and took note of the various places and persons we met on the road.

At Sheet Bridge we were stopped by a toll-gate, the driver exchanging a few angry words with the villainous-looking man who held the gate.

Beyond was a short, steep hill, up which we both walked, the driver having thrown the reins across his horse's back. At the summit was a gallows, from which hung something black. As we drew nearer I could see that the dark object was all that remained of what was once a man. The corpse, daubed with pitch, was encircled with iron hoops like a cage, and as the wind howled over the hilltop the chain that suspended the cage creaked horribly.

The corpse could not have been there for long; it certainly was not there on the occasion of my last journey with my father to Petersfield. I noticed that the little finger of each hand was missing!

The driver looked at me over his shoulder, as if to note the effect that this

horrible sight might have on a youth.

"See you?" he queried, knowing full well that I could not well miss seeing it unless I were blind.

I nodded. "Let yon be a waarning to 'e, young maaster. Do 'e never taake to killin'. 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.'" And with this remarkable discourse he slowly climbed back to his seat on the wagon, I following him.

But I was not satisfied. Those missing fingers puzzled me, and I ventured to ask why the hands had been mutilated. For answer he plunged his hand into one of his many pockets and produced a small object that looked like a leather purse. This he opened and pulled out a human finger, the stump being mounted with silver! For a moment he held it before my eyes; then, as if too precious to be exposed to the light of day, he carefully replaced it in its wrappings.

"Young maaster," he replied, "for certain prevention of agues, fever, small-pox, plague, and all divers illnesses, for certain proof against the evil eye, there is nowt that can compare with the little finger of a murderer."

By this time the square tower of Petersfield Church was in sight, and soon after we drew up in the courtyard of the "Red Lion", where, since it was market day, there were numbers of carts and wagons from the countryside for miles around.

In the midst of the bustle and noise I saw that mingled with the countryfolk were several soldiers, while in a corner of the courtyard was a ponderous coach, which, if I mistook not, was the very one that passed me yesternight at Rake Hill.

It was but ten in the morning, and the two occupants of the coach had not yet appeared. Apparently an accident had befallen the conveyance, for a smith was busily engaged with hammer and cold chisel in repairing one of the wheels.

Notwithstanding their Puritanical garb, most of the troopers had, even at this early hour, partaken of spirituous drinks, and, judging by their gestures and talk, were evidently anticipating the restoration of His Majesty King Charles.

Perceiving a serving maid at one of the windows, one of the soldiers began to make love to her in dumb show, kissing his hand and waving his iron headpiece to the damsel, who seemed nothing loath to accept his advances.

Presently she opened the casement, and, leaning out, threw him a flower. Few women can throw straight, and this one was no exception. Her missile flew far above the man's head, and, running backwards in a vain endeavour to catch it, he fell heavily into a large trough of pigs' mash, where, half-stunned by the force of his fall, he lay wallowing in the sticky mess, till he was helped out by his comrades, to the accompaniment of their jeers and laughter.

Having carried all my belongings into the inn, the old carter bade me farewell; and as the sound of his footsteps was lost in the outside din, I felt as if the last link that bound me to the home of my childhood was severed.

The host of the "Red Lion", an old soldier by appearance, came in and asked me what I lacked. I told him I was waiting for the chapman who travelled between Winton, Petersfield, and Portsmouth, and at the same time ordered a meal, for the morning ride had made me hungry.

The landlord hurried off, for callers were many that morning, and whilst I was waiting I took stock of the room. It was panelled, and had thick oak rafters and low ceiling. Though the weather was warm, a large fire blazed on the hearth, while the wall above the chimney corner was hung with an assortment of old weapons.

There were three other occupants of the room, two of whom sat in the chimney corner, leaning over the fire as if it were a winter's day, while the third was spread out on the settle, gazing stolidly at his companions. They had evidently been engaged in deep conversation, but on my arrival they stopped talking and eyed me with no goodwill.

All three were villainous-looking men, dark-skinned and heavy-browed. One had a livid weal across his cheek, while another was deeply pitted with smallpox. The third had his face nearly concealed in a dark beard that grew so high on his cheek as almost to meet his eyebrows. Their clothes were old and ragged; their belongings were limited to a small bundle that was placed by each man's side. Three large tankards, lying upset on the floor, showed that their refreshment had been copious, while the reek of strong spirits hung around them like an invisible cloud.

They made no secret of the fact that my inquisitive glances were unwelcome, and so much did they scowl that I turned hastily away and looked out of the window, where the brilliant sunshine, beating down on the crowded courtyard, made a pleasing contrast to the dismal trio within.

The arrival of another wayfarer next diverted my thoughts. The newcomer was a burly, good-natured farmer, who, after giving the three men a cheery salutation, which they returned surlily enough, sat down opposite to me.

Just then the landlord reappeared, and offered excuses for not having a better room at his disposal. "Two officers and a troop of horse," said he, "have stayed here overnight. What their business is I know not. The men are free with everything but their own affairs. Not even spiced ale makes their tongues wag in that direction. Their masters say less. Still, 'tis not my business; they pay well. But even this young gentleman has to stay here for want of better room. Ah, bethink me! Didst pass Carver, the chapman, on your way hither?"

"Are your wits wool-gathering, Master Host?" replied the other. "Seeing that Carver gave notice that on Tuesday he would go direct from Winton, instead of through this town, and that to-day happens to be Tuesday----"

"Of course!" ejaculated the landlord; "I had forgotten."

For a moment I felt staggered, then I asked if there were other means of continuing my way.

"None, young sir; but there is ample accommodation here for man and beast till Thursday, when a wagon from Alton to Portsmouth passes this hostel."

I shook my head. The idea of spending two days and nights in this place was out of the question. "I must go on," I replied, "even if I walk."

"You've pluck!" exclaimed the farmer. "'Tis a good eighteen miles. Were it any day but this I'd take you part of the way."

I thanked him, and asked the landlord to take care of my trunks till the Thursday; and, having finished my repast, I prepared to go.

Having paid my account in gold, and received a quantity of silver change, which the landlord counted slowly into my hand, I bade the kindly farmer good-bye, and set off southward along a dusty, chalky road.

After crossing a small stream, and proceeding over a long causeway, the road began slowly, yet gradually, to rise, evidently making for a gap between two lofty hills. Two miles brought me to the foot of the downs, where all signs of cultivation terminated abruptly, and only a treeless expanse of turf-covered hills met my eye.

It was warm work that last part of the ascent, and on gaining the summit of the road I found that the hillside still towered on both sides, the highway running through a steep chalk cutting.

Out of breath, I sat down on a grassy bank and looked back upon the country I had just left. Miles and miles of well-wooded land lay beneath me, extending far away to the North Downs. I could see the town of Petersfield nestling around the square tower of the old church. I could trace the dusty road along which I had journeyed, save the last half-mile, which was hidden by a chalk cliff that rose some two hundred yards away on the right.

For over a quarter of an hour I sat enjoying this magnificent view, when suddenly round the bend of the road by the base of the cliff appeared three men whom I had no difficulty in recognizing as the ill-favoured visitors at the "Red Lion".

Then like a lightning flash the thought swept across my mind that, having seen the landlord give me a sum of silver, they had followed me to this lonesome spot.

I immediately sprang to my feet, and walked sharply onwards through the cutting. Ever and anon I looked back, and found that they were increasing their pace into almost a trot; so, directly I had put the brow of the hill betwixt them and me, I ran steadily but not too swiftly down the road. Even as I ran I took in my surroundings. In front was the long, white road, still descending till it turned to the left beyond a grassy spur of the hill that hid it from view, though

at a considerable distance from it. Here and there were a few stunted bushes, too scanty to afford shelter, while not a habitation nor a human being was to be seen.

Again I looked back. Notwithstanding the climb, the men had gained on me, and were even now running at full speed down the incline--not two hundred yards away. One had out-distanced the others, yet all three were keeping up a rapid pace.

Instinctively I increased my speed to the utmost, and, with my elbows pressed closely against my sides, swung down the road in a vain endeavour to meet a friendly being, or at least to outdistance my pursuers.

Once round that bend, surely there would be a house or some succour; but no, only another stretch of chalky road. Then I thought to leave the road and climb the steep, grassy slope on my left, and before my pursuers had turned the corner I was staggering madly up the bank, where, under the frail shelter of a stunted bush, I lay down and panted like a hunted hare.

In a very short time the first of my pursuers appeared round the bend. It was the one with the scarred face, and, being in addition grimed with sweat and dust, and panting heavily, he presented a truly ferocious aspect.

When he saw the open road with no sign of his quarry he stopped, swearing and blaspheming horribly, till his fellow rogues came up. From my hiding place I could distinctly hear and see all, they being but forty yards away, and some fifty feet below me. In spite of my terror I kept them in view, and, being weaponless, I looked around for some means of defence. Close to my feet was a large rabbit hole, and knowing from past experience that these animals frequently throw up flints and other stones from their burrows, I plunged my hand into the newly excavated earth, and to my delight found a large jagged flint, and soon after my armoury consisted of five good-sized stones. Then a piece of wood, lying within two yards of the bush, and evidently a part of a hurdle, met my eye. This I seized, but the act led to my undoing, for one of the men, happening to look my way, saw me as I cautiously backed towards my shelter.

A volley of hideous oaths greeted my discovery, and immediately the black-bearded fellow and the man who had proved the fastest of the three began to climb the hill.

I retreated slowly, so as to save my breath. Again the wealed-faced man outdistanced his companion, and soon I could hear his deep panting behind me.

Then suddenly I turned, and, throwing one of the largest stones, hit him fairly in the midriff. With a loud howl he dropped on his knees and pressed his hands to his injured part, his cudgel rolling down the slope till stopped by the other man.

The third rogue, seeing how matters stood, also began to climb the slope. For my part, flushed with my success, I slowly edged away, intending to make a

detour, regain the road, and then retrace my steps towards Petersfield; for I knew what sort of road I had already passed, but was in ignorance of the distance to which this wild valley extended.

Still climbing, I reached the sloping ridge round the base of which the road bent. Once again I could follow the highway leading to the chalk cutting, and to my unbounded delight I saw for the third time that ponderous coach with its attendant troopers descending the hill at a sharp pace.

The strong wind that was blowing towards the approaching cavalcade, and the dusty road, both tended to deaden the sound of the horses' hoofs and the dull rumble of the carriage, and as yet the villains were unaware of their danger.

On the summit of the ridge I turned towards them. Instinctively they separated, yet came on apace--the man whom I had hit with the stone limping onward with an effort, the others, each with a knife in his hand, working away on either side with the intention of preventing my escape. As the bearded ruffian came within throwing distance I flung a stone with all my might, and had he not quickly bounded aside, there would have been another point in my favour.

As soon as he gained the top of the ridge, though some feet below me, I made a sudden rush towards him, intending to make a feint and then run towards the troopers. The man stood on his guard, his knife glittering in the sunlight, though evidently astonished at my apparent rashness.

When close upon him I darted to one side and ran quickly down the hill. Suddenly my foot caught in a rabbit hole, and I fell headlong, rolling over and over in my descent.

With a savage curse my assailant rushed towards my prostrate body, and even as he did so he caught sight of the troopers.

His cursing changed into a howl of terror as he vainly tried to check his descent; but ere he could recover himself three of the horsemen had spurred their steeds betwixt him and the rest of the troop. He lay on the ground whining dismally, while the soldiers hastily trussed him up with a length of stout cord.

Meanwhile the coach had stopped, and as I approached, limping from the effects of my fall, its two occupants looked out of the window to enquire the cause of the disturbance.

Hastily I told my story, and hardly had I finished, when the elder of the two officers called to the sergeant: "Quickly, Sedgewyke! Secure those other rascals!"

Half a dozen troopers were quickly out of their saddles, and, leaving their horses in the care of two others, made their way up the slope towards the spot where the remaining rogues were last seen. He of the scarred face was quickly captured, being well-nigh winded with the effects of the stone I had thrown; but the third was a more determined quarry, though, in his stupidity, instead of climbing upwards (being far lighter than the soldiers, encumbered as they were with

breast-pieces and riding-boots), he must needs make for the road, where he raced off at breakneck speed.

"A crown for the man who brings him down, dead or alive!" shouted the officer, who looked upon the pursuit with the eagerness of a sportsman.

Already the soldiers had regained their horses, and, leaving four as a guard over the prisoners, dashed in pursuit of the fugitive. Too late the wretch saw his mistake, and again ran from the road towards a steep bank of chalk that towered up for nearly fifty feet above the stretch of level grassland at its base.

Lifting me into the coach, the elder man gave orders to follow the chase, and soon we pulled up close to where the terror-stricken fugitive was making a desperate effort to scale the slippery bank.

"Middleton, we have some sport! I'll wager my largest snuffbox against thine that the rogue will outwit your eleven men."

"Taken," replied the other. "Now, men," he shouted, "remember, a crown, dead or alive!"

The troopers were drawn up in an irregular line along the edge of the road, and had drawn their pistols from their holsters.

Bang! A man on the extreme left had fired. The ball struck the cliff just above the fugitive's head, bringing down a small avalanche of chalk and dust. Digging his hands into the yielding soil, the wretched man raised himself another two feet. Being but thirty yards from us, his desperate efforts were plainly visible.

Bang! Bang! Two reports in quick succession echoed down the valley. This time, whether hit or not, the man slid some six feet downwards, till his foot caught in a projection and stopped his descent.

"Not so fast there," grumbled the sergeant. "If you fire like that, who can claim the reward? Now, then, Wagstaff!"

Calmly, as if at the butts, the row of men began to fire in turn. At the sixth shot the miserable villain made a feeble attempt to regain his former position, but ere he had ascended another two feet a shot struck him in the back of the head, and he tumbled to the bottom of the bank a hideously disfigured corpse.

Striding over to the body the sergeant turned it over on its back, made sure that life was extinct, then returned to the door of the coach, and, saluting, said: "Trooper Jenkins's shot, sir, brought the rogue down."

The elder man gave the sergeant the promised reward, then, turning to his companion, with a low bow, presented him with the snuffbox.

With this ceremonious display the tragedy was brought to a close, and the two officers, learning that I was on my way to Portsmouth, consented to let me ride with them.

The troopers formed up again, the prisoners firmly bound to two of their number, and the cavalcade passed onwards, leaving by the roadside a motionless

object that had once been a man.

As we journeyed along, the officers plied me with questions, taking a great interest in my account of my meeting with the three footpads. The older of the two officers was about forty years of age, bronzed with the sun and wrinkled with exposure to the weather. His blue eyes twinkled in a kindly manner, while his lips, partly concealed by his closely trimmed moustache and beard, denoted both firmness and discretion.

His companion, apparently ten years younger, also wore a beard of Van Dyck cut. His appearance, however, denoted a man who was given to perform actions on the spur of the moment rather than to be ruled by deliberate counsel. He was addressed as Middleton by his companion, but I could not then gather what was the name of the elder man. Both men wore flowing lovelocks, and affected the rich apparel of the Cavaliers, which contrasted vividly with the sombre garb of their escort.

When I mentioned that I was on my way to my uncle, Master Anderson, the younger of the twain gave his companion a wink that did not escape me, and remarked: "Then, Master Aubrey, we'll see more of thee anon, if I mistake not."

The coach now descended a long declivity, at the bottom of which lay a straggling village, which, I was told, boasted of the name of Horndean. Here we rested the horses, my two benefactors going into the inn, from which presently a man came out bringing me a cup of milk and a plate of coarse brown bread and rich yellow cheese.

In half an hour the journey was resumed, the road leading up a short, steep incline and then plunging into a dense wood, which once formed a royal hunting-ground--the Forest of Bere.

At length we entered a deep, dark hollow, where the shade made a blinding contrast to the glare of the sun.

Suddenly there was a shrill whistle, followed by a sound of scuffling, a score of round oaths, and the sharp report of firearms.

The coach came to a sudden standstill, throwing me from my seat, while the others jumped out, unsheathing their swords as they did so.

I too made for the door, and could see the troopers preparing to fire into a thicket on the left-hand side of the road, while one of their number lay on the ground, his head bleeding from a severe wound.

After the next volley some of the men plunged into the underwood, encouraged by the voice of the sergeant shouting: "After him, men, at all costs; he cannot be far off."

A moment later there was a sound of harsh voices, the noise of stones striking against steel, more pistol-shots, and then quietness, broken at length by the return of the troopers bearing between them a man who moaned and cursed lustily

as he was carried by none too tender hands.

"How now, Sedgewyke!" thundered his officer. "Who is this? 'Tis not the man we lost. Where is he?"

The sergeant saluted, and told his story: The troop was riding in a straggling manner, one of the men, who had a prisoner bound behind him (he with the scarred face), being in the rear. Without warning a stout rope that had been stretched between two trees on opposite sides of the road was dropped, and, catching the unfortunate soldier under the chin, hurled him and his prisoner to the ground. In a moment a party of men had run from the cover of the brushwood, freed the captive, and, after hamstringing the trooper's horse, had made their escape to the depths of the forest before the rest of the escort could realize what had occurred.

Pursued by the soldiers, they let fly a shower of stones, and in the confusion that followed had made good their retreat, with one exception-- a man who had received a ball in the right ankle.

Though chagrined by the loss of their prisoner, the capture of one of his rescuers was a redeeming feature of the fray, and the latest captive was brought before the officers for the purpose of being interrogated.

He was a young man, scarce more than twenty years of age, with a heavy poll of red hair. His sinewy arms were tattooed with various devices, while on his chest, exposed during the scuffle, a death's-head and cross-bones were crudely drawn. When questioned he maintained a surly silence, only asking for water in a dialect that, country-bred though I am, I could not readily understand.

"Methinks I have met others of this kind before," remarked the elder officer. "A Dorset man, I'll wager, and, that being so, he's either smuggler or pirate. Whether he be of Poole or Weymouth 'tis all the same. Far rather would I meet Dutchman or Frenchman in fair fight than be cast ashore on the devil-haunted coast of Purbeck. Now, Sedgewyke, I pray you dispatch that horse and let us hasten on, unless we wish to be benighted on the highway."

The sergeant saluted again and retired, while Middleton and his friend returned to the carriage. A shot announced that the maimed animal's sufferings were ended, and the troopers, with their two prisoners now safely in the centre, broke into a trot, the coach swaying to and fro as it rumbled over the rough road.

The sun was sinking low when we reached the summit of Portsdown, a long stretch of chalky down, whence I saw Portsmouth for the first time.

To one living in the hilliest and most picturesque part of Hampshire and Sussex this first glimpse came as a disappointment. I saw below me an island so flat as to make it appear difficult to tell where the land ended and where the water began. Save for a few trees and some scattered houses there was little to break the dreariness of it, while, the tide being out (as I afterwards learnt), long expanses of

mud on either side increased this aspect of monotonous desolation. At the far end of the island I could distinguish the cluster of houses that formed the town. At the near end was a narrow creek, which we must needs cross to gain our destination, while away on the right was a square tower, which, they told me, was the castle of Portchester.

This was my first view of Portsmouth, and also of the sea, and I must confess I felt heartily disappointed with both.

We soon descended the hill, passed through the little hamlet of Cosham, and crossed the creek by a narrow bridge. A short three miles now separated us from the town, and on approaching it I saw a large mound of earth, called the Town Mount, crowned by fortifications and fronted by a line of bastions and earthworks, which in turn were encircled with a moat that communicated with the mill dam on the right.

Beyond rose the red-tiled roofs of the houses, the whole being dominated by the massive square tower of St. Thomas's Church.

At the Landport Gate we were received by a guard of soldiers, and as we entered the town my first impressions were removed by the sight of so much life and bustle.

Inside the line of fortification the guard had turned out for the purpose of doing honour to my travelling companions. The sight of the rows of pikemen with their eighteen-feet weapons riveted my attention till I was recalled to my senses by being dismissed by my benefactors, who gave me in charge of a sour-visaged soldier, with instructions to take me to the house of Master Anderson in St. Thomas's Street.

Soon I found myself at the door of a tall, gabled house, where, without waiting, my guide left me.

With a feeling of timidity I knocked, and the door was opened. I saw before me a rotund little man with a puffy face that a well-trimmed beard partially concealed. His face was pitted with smallpox, but his eyes, though swollen with the result of high living, twinkled in a kindly manner, yet showed promise of quickly firing up in anger.

I was unable to utter a word, and stood still, feeling considerably uneasy under his enquiring gaze. Neither did he speak; so, driven to desperation, I at length gathered up courage and stammered: "Sir, I am your nephew, Aubrey Wentworth."

CHAPTER IV--How Judgment was Passed on the Dorset Smugglers

I soon accustomed myself to my new home. My Uncle George treated me with every consideration--a fact that ill-disposed persons would have attributed to the legacy left him under my father's will. Though far from being in needy circumstances--receiving as Clerk of the Survey at the dockyard a salary of £50, paid with more or less irregularity--it was evident that his brother-in-law's bounty did not come amiss.

I have already given a description of my uncle. His wife, my father's sister, was tall, sparely built, and somewhat inclined to verbosity. It did not take me long to ascertain that the pair were ill-assorted, and when on certain occasions their dispute waxed hot, my uncle was invariably driven from the house by the unrestrained reproaches of his spouse.

They had but two children, Maurice, a lad a year older than myself, and Mercy, a child of nine years. I was soon on capital terms with both, though, boylike, I treated Mercy with that sort of contempt that most boys of my age show their female relations.

I lost little time in telling my uncle the story of my adventures on the road, and, happening to mention the name of Middleton, he exclaimed:

"Why, lad, you've made a good friend. 'Tis none other than Colonel Thomas Middleton, lately appointed commissioner of this dockyard, and he who rode with him is Admiral Montague, who comes to take the fleet to Holland."

This, then, was the gallant Montague, a man who, under the Commonwealth, had earned renown when fighting with Blake the fleets of Holland and of Spain, and whose prompt action in co-operating with Monk and taking command of the fleet sent to fetch the king from Holland did much to earn the royal

gratitude and favour.

On the morrow following my arrival I, in company with my cousin Maurice, was taken by my uncle to the dockyard.

Here all was activity and noise. Most of the fleet--amongst which were pointed out to me the *Yarmouth*, *Swiftsure*, *London*, and *Ruby*--lay at anchor at some distance from the wharves, while close alongside were the *Naseby*, her name being changed to the *Royal Charles*, and the *Montague*.

There was but one dry dock, and in it lay the *Providence*; and on a slip, being nearly fit for launching, stood a large ship of seventy-six guns, her name having but recently been changed to the *Royal Oak*.

While we were looking on with astonishment at this busy scene, a short, thick-set man, whose portly body was ill supported by a pair of bandy legs, came towards the place where we stood. He wore a blue uniform, with three-cornered hat, and carried at his side a sword that trailed behind him as he walked, and even threatened to become entangled between his legs.

"Ha! Captain Duce of the *Lizard*! Stand aside, boys, while I have speech with him."

The captain was in a rage.

"A pretty pass! Here lie I ready to weigh and make sail, but ne'er a loaf of bread aboard!"

"I cannot help you, Captain," replied my uncle. "I can only refer you to the Commissioner."

"Hang the Commissioner!" roared the irate officer. "First I am directed to apply to him; he sends me to you; you thereupon give me cold comfort by sending me again to the Commissioner. How can I take my ship to sea lacking bread and flour? Ah! Here, sirrah!" he broke off, noticing a man passing by. "Here, sirrah! You're the person I want."

The man addressed came across to where the captain and my uncle were debating. His calling was apparent, he being covered from head to foot with flour.

"Well, Hunt, how is it Captain Duce can get no supplies from you?"

The baker shook his head. "Over a thousand pounds are due to my partner and me," said he. "We were to be paid monthly, but have received nothing since September last. Verily, I am afraid to go abroad lest I am arrested by my creditors, whom I cannot pay, as the Navy Commissioners will not pay me!"

Without waiting to hear further, for complaints of arrears of payment were a common occurrence, Maurice and I stole away and wandered towards the slip where the *Royal Oak* was nearing completion.

A noble sight she made, this immense yellow-painted hull, with her double tier of gunports and her towering stern, richly ornamented with gilded quarter badges and richly carved galleries. Little did we know that a short seven years

hence would see the ship, the pride of the king's navy, a battered and fire-swept wreck--but I anticipate.

In the midst of strange surroundings the time passed rapidly. Already the Restoration was an accomplished fact. Charles II was again at Whitehall "in the twelfth year of his reign", as the crown document has it. The gilded effigy of his sainted father was restored to its niche in the Square Tower at Portsmouth, where all persons passing were ordered to uncover. With few exceptions the townspeople welcomed the change, the whole place being given up to unrestrained merrymaking.

One morning in June I was called into our living-room, and found myself confronted by a gold-laced individual, who, drawing a paper from his pocket, read in a sonorous voice a summons for me to attend at the courthouse as a witness against Dick Swyre and Caleb Keeping, presented for committing a murderous attack upon divers of the king's subjects on the highway.

On the appointed day I attended the court, accompanied by my uncle. There were several cases dealt with before the one in which I had to give evidence, and, though it was in keeping with the times, the severity of most of the sentences struck me as being most barbarous.

One poor woman, privileged to take chips from the dockyard, had been apprehended in the act of stealing two iron bolts. Her punishment was that she "should return to the Gaol from whence she came, and there remain until Saturday next between the hours of Eleven and Twelve of the Clock in the forenoon, at which time she was to be brought to the public Whipping-post, and there receive Twenty Lashes with a Cat-of-Nine-Tails from the hands of the Common Beadle on her naked back till the same shall be bloody, and then return to the said Gaol and remain until her fees be paid!"

If this were fitting punishment for a petty theft, what, thought I, will be the corresponding penalty for these two highwaymen?

Presently Dick Swyre and Caleb Keeping were placed in the dock. The first-named was the bearded ruffian who had so nearly settled my account in the valley near Petersfield, and now, knowing full well that his neck was already in the hangman's noose, his demeanour was one of sullen ferocity, and, though he was heavily manacled, his appearance was like that of a savage beast awaiting its opportunity to spring.

The other, Keeping, did not appear to be of the same debased kind as his companion, though his matted red hair and sunburnt face and arms betokened a villain whose existence had been of an out-door kind. There was a look of haunting terror in his face that turned the bronze of his complexion into a pale-yellowish hue, while it could be seen that he had great difficulty in keeping his limbs under control.

I was the first witness called, and on concluding my evidence, which dealt solely with the first prisoner, Swyre leant across the front of the dock, raised his fettered hands, and with a terrible oath poured out the most frightful imprecations against me, vowing that sooner or later his mates would doubly avenge themselves on my miserable carcass, till at length, by dint of blows liberally bestowed by his custodians, he was restrained, though his low cursing and threats were distinctly audible during the rest of the trial.

Several of the soldiers of Colonel Middleton's party, including Sergeant Sedgewyke, having given evidence, it was thought that the case for the prosecution was concluded, but a shiver of excitement ran through the court when an order was given: "Call Joseph Hawkes".

The cry was taken up by the usher and repeated thrice ere there hobbled into the well of the court an object that could scarce lay claim to being called a man. Yet there was no mistaking the fact that Hawkes was or had been a sailor, for a strong odour of tar, which was a pleasant relief to the fetid atmosphere of the crowded court, hovered around him like a cloud. He was about fifty years of age, wizened and bent. His face, burnt by exposure to all weathers, was of a deep mahogany hue. One eye was covered with a patch, the other appeared to be fixed in its socket, inasmuch as whenever he looked he had to turn his head straight in that direction. A mass of lank hair, terminating in a greasy pigtail, covered his head.

His left arm was missing, the empty sleeve being fastened to his coat; and, as if these deficiencies were not enough, his left leg had been cut off at the knee joint, and was replaced by a wooden stump. The fingers of his right hand were dried like a mummy's, the nails being blackened with hard work at sea and the continual use of tobacco, and I noticed that one of his fingers was also missing.

Having been administered the oath, his examination commenced.

"You are Joseph Hawkes?"

"Yes, your Honour."

"Do you know either of the prisoners?"

"Yes, saving your presence, that red-haired villain yonder!"

"Now, sirrah," exclaimed the prosecuting lawyer, addressing Caleb Keeping, "methinks you know this witness!"

But the prisoner replied not, except to shake his head sheepishly.

"Proceed with your evidence, Master Hawkes."

The man hitched at his nether garments, pulled his forelock, and without further delay plunged into his story, which, stripped of its peculiarities of dialect, was as follows:--

"Two years ago last May I shipped as mate of the bark *Speedie*, of Poole, outward bound for the Tagus. The same night as we cleared Poole harbour we

were overtaken by a gale from the south'ard, and soon got into difficulties close to the Purbeck coast. Seven times did we 'bout ship to try and claw off the shore, but at daybreak we struck close to Anvil Point."

Here the younger prisoner began to show signs of terrified interest--a fact that most of those present were not slow to note.

"The masts went by the board, our boats were carried away, and the old *Speedie* began to break up. One by one the crew were swept overboard, and at last a heavy sea took me, and I remember fighting for life in the waves till I lost consciousness.

"When I came to I was lying on a flat ledge or platform of rock with the hot sun streaming down on me. The gale had now abated, but there were plenty of signs of its results. Numbers of bales and barrels, that had formed our cargo, were being collected on the platform by a number of villainous-looking, half-naked men. A slight tingling pain in my hand made me look down, and I saw that one of my fingers had been cut off, so that one of the wretches could steal a paltry silver ring I was wearing.

"Just then I heard a shout, and, keeping perfectly still, I looked under my half-closed eyelids and saw two of the wreckers dragging a body up the rocks. It was the master of the *Speedie*, poor old John Cartridge of Hamworthy. The wretches began to hack his fingers off, as they had done mine, and even tore a pair of ear-rings forcibly from his ears. Old John wasn't dead, for this treatment revived him. Seeing this, one of the men, who is none other than that red-haired devil yonder, plunged a knife into his back and toppled his body into the sea."

At this the younger prisoner yelled in a terror-stricken voice: "No, no! You are mistaken. 'Twill be my brother as done it. 'Twas not I."

"Liar!" retorted the old seaman. "I'll prove it. Let your men bare his back, good sir, and if he hath not the sign of the Jolly Roger tattooed there, I'll take back my word."

The justice nodded his assent, and the tip-staves proceeded to remove the clothing from the prisoner's back. Sure enough, there was a death's-head and cross-bones indelibly impressed there.

"Continue your evidence, Master Hawkes."

"Well, your Honour, as I was a-saying, after they had rid themselves of the master's body, the wretches began to carry their plunder into a cave that opened from the back of the flat rock. Presently one of them stops by me. 'What shall us do with 'e?' he shouts. I kept very still, feigning death, yet expecting every moment to have a knife betwixt my ribs. 'Is 'e done with?' asked another. 'Then overboard with 'im.' Next minute I felt myself being dragged across the platform and pushed off the edge. I fell about a score of feet, striking the water with a heavy splash. When I came to the top I struck out, and found myself close to a shelf of

rock which the overhanging ledge hid from the villains above. Here I remained till the coast was clear, then I scrambled up, in spite of my wounds, and made my way across some downs till I met with a kindly farmer, who took me to Wareham.

"When I reported the matter to the authorities a body of men were sent from Wareham and Poole; but though they discovered the caves, not a trace of the wreckers, their spoils, or the remains of the *Speedie* was to be found."

The rest of the evidence was soon concluded, proving without doubt that both men were members of a notorious band of Dorset smugglers, whose misdeeds had caused the utmost consternation for years past; and the case was settled by sending both prisoners to the assizes at Winchester.

It is unnecessary to dwell upon the account of my journey to Winton to repeat my evidence; but on the return journey (having heard both men sentenced to death), as we were passing through a wood between Twyford and Waltham, a pistol was fired at our coach, the ball shattering the glass and passing close to my uncle's head.

This outrage was put down to the highwaymen of Waltham Chase; but in my own mind I attributed it to the vengeance of the smugglers' gang, which surmise I afterwards found was correct.

The two men suffered the extreme penalty of the law. I was taken to see them gibbeted on Southsea beach. Such occasions are invariably regarded as a kind of holiday, and thousands of townsfolk and people from the surrounding country came to see the sentence carried out.

Caleb Keeping died like an arrant coward, whining like a whipped cur as the executioner bound him. Already half-dead with fear, he submitted to being compelled to mount the ladder, whence he was thrown violently, and in a few moments all was over. But with Dick Swyre it was different. Heedless of death, and accustomed to scenes of violence, he strove to the last, cursing the crowd and endeavouring to burst his bonds.

While most of the onlookers jeered, it was evident that some of his friends were present, and at one time it looked as if a rescue was about to be attempted; but the soldiers kept back the press, and in spite of his violent struggles the prisoner was brought underneath the gallows, where a rope was deftly passed round his neck. Still cursing and struggling, the wretch was hoisted, and five minutes elapsed ere his last convulsive motions ceased.

Though the crowd looked upon this incident as a diversion, to me it seemed otherwise. True, two deep-dyed criminals had got their deserts; but I felt that my share in the affair had gained me many unknown enemies. This impression grew after an attempt had been made to burn my uncle's house, and I had been deliberately pushed from the quayside into the Camber by a seaman; and these incidents so preyed upon my mind that I was unfeignedly glad when I was asked

if I should like to go to sea.

CHAPTER V--Of my First Ship, the *Gannet*

Once it had been settled that I should go to sea, my uncle lost no time in getting me a ship. Through his influence, his intimacy with Sir Thomas Middleton, and also through the interest which Sir Thomas showed towards me, the matter was an easy one, and before August was out I found myself being escorted down to the dockyard to join the *Gannet*.

This stout craft I must describe. She was of six hundred tons burthen and pierced for fifty guns. She had three masts, besides a small one at her bowsprit-head. When first I saw her she was having a new mizzen fitted, her old mast having been lost in a gale outside the Wight.

Her figurehead represented a man on horseback trampling on a Dutchman, a Frenchman, a Spaniard, and an Algerine. I was told that the horseman was supposed to be the arch-traitor, Old Noll, but a clever hewer of wood had caused all likeness of the great rebel to disappear, and had graven instead the features of honest George, now created Duke of Albemarle.

Her stern gallery was upheld by a row of gilt figures representing that hero of mythology, Master Atlas, of whom my father used to speak; while over the gallery towered three enormous lanterns, and above everything was a maze of spars and rigging that confused me not a little, though before long I was well acquainted with the names of all of them.

This much did I see from the dockyard wall, for the *Gannet* was lying at anchor in the harbour. One of the seamen on the quay hailed her through a speaking-trumpet, and presently a longboat came off for us, manned by ten lusty rowers, while a boy of about my own age sat in the stern-sheets steering the boat and giving orders to the men as if the commanding of the boat had been his life-long business.

Directly we embarked--that is, my uncle, my cousin Maurice, and myself--the boat pushed off, and urged by long strokes soon covered the distance betwixt

the shore and the ship. As she neared the latter the youngster shouted: "Oars!" in such a loud voice that I thought something had happened. The rowers immediately tossed their oars, while the boat ran alongside the *Gannet*.

We climbed by a steep ladder up the rounding side of the ship, my uncle performing the feat with surprising agility, though he was puffing heartily when he gained the deck and took off his hat to the royal arms that graced the quarterdeck at the break of the poop.

We were received by the captain, one Adrian Poynings, said to be a descendant of the fiery governor of Portsmouth who bore the same name, and whose will was the terror of the inhabitants of Portsmouth in the days of Queen Bess.

The captain did not appear to bear the same reputation as did his ancestor. He seemed, for a king's officer, a very mild-mannered gentleman, for when speaking to his subordinates he would say: "Desire Master So-and-so to do this", or "Desire the bos'n to be sent to me"; and so on.

Having been introduced to him, I was sent off in charge of a midshipman to be shown round the ship. This youngster, whose name was Greville Drake (a remote relation of the immortal Sir Francis Drake), was one of the six gentlemen midshipmen serving on the ship. He appeared to be a keen young officer, knowing the ins and outs of everything, yet withal he was of a roguish disposition, and given to skylarking. Before long we were excellent friends.

Having inspected the waist of the ship, the main and upper gundecks, he led me below to the orlop deck, where right aft was situated the gunroom or midshipmen's mess.

Here, illuminated by the glimmer of a couple of purser's dips, or tallow candles, was the place where for the next two or three years I was to live and sleep--otherwise my floating home. The heavy beams were so low that I was obliged to stoop when passing underneath them. Innumerable cockroaches crawled across the floor or attempted to climb the sides of the cabin, till pinked by a well-directed thrust with a sail-needle.

There were four other midshipmen, taking things as easily as their surroundings would permit, and on our entry I was warmly greeted with a volley of remarks that were both good-natured and humorous.

But my tour of the *Gannet* was by no means finished, my mentor evidently meaning to make me thoroughly acquainted with the ship. Below the orlop deck we went, passing down a steep ladder to the flats, or part of the ship immediately above the ballast. The amidship portion of this space is termed the cockpit, and, though nearly empty, it did not require much imagination on my part to see the forms of mangled seamen dimly outlined in the feeble glimmer of the lantern, young Drake telling me of some of the ghastly sights of the cockpit during action in a highly-worded and realistic style.

I could discern the heels of the fore and main masts, and the well of the ship's pump, while farther away was a stack of imperishable ship's stores, from which a number of rats darted, seemingly unmindful of our presence.

When we gained the daylight once more I blinked like an owl, breathing in the fresh air with a relish that the stifling atmosphere of between decks had caused; but short was my respite, for my new friend asked me whether I would be bold enough to go to the foretopmast head.

Not wishing to be thought a coward, and having had plenty of experience of tree-climbing, I assented; and Drake, kicking off his shoes, immediately sprang into the shrouds, making his way aloft with marvellous rapidity.

I followed, clinging tenaciously to the shrouds with my hands, while my bare feet were tortured by the contact with the sharp ratlines. However, I stuck to it, followed Drake over the futtock shrouds, where for a space I felt like a fly on a ceiling, and at length gained the foretop.

Without pausing for breath my guide literally jumped into the topmast shrouds, and before I had attempted to follow he was perched upon the crosstrees. Five minutes later I was by his side, and I must confess that on looking down I experienced a feeling of giddiness that required a strong effort on my part to overcome. Eighty feet below, the deck looked like a long, narrow strip of dazzling white planks, the crew appearing no larger than manikins.

"You have pluck, Aubrey," remarked Drake. "I thought you would have shrunk from the task, or, in any case, have climbed no farther than the foretop. And you didn't crawl through the lubber's hole, either!"

"The lubber's hole! What's that?"

"Those openings on the tops. Greenhorns generally scramble through those instead of going over the futtock shrouds. I say, can you swim?"

"No," I replied. "An old shipman whom I know, one Master Collings, of Gosport, used to say that swimming was a useless art, for when a man fell overboard his agony was only unduly prolonged."

"Ah! Many an old seaman thinks the same, but nevertheless to be able to swim comes in very handy. Supposing you fell overboard; well, in nine cases out of ten you would be picked up again if you could swim. I've been knocked overboard as often as four times and I am still here. Now, take the first opportunity and let me teach you."

I thanked my newly-found friend for his offer, and, now thoroughly rested, I began my descent to the deck, grasping the shrouds tightly and feeling very gingerly with one foot till I found a secure foothold.

On gaining the deck I saw that my uncle and the captain had been watching my manoeuvres, both being well satisfied with my maiden efforts at going aloft.

The time of parting had come, and dry-eyed, though with a curious feeling

in my throat, I bade farewell to my uncle and cousin Maurice.

I watched them row ashore, waving my handkerchief as they went, and when they reached the wharf they waited to see the *Gannet* get under way.

It was a busy scene, and an operation in which I could take no part. The captain gave the ship in charge to the master; the red cross of St. George was struck at the gaff and run up to the peak. The shrill notes of the bosn's whistle had hardly died away when the rigging was alive with men; the canvas was spread from the yards as if by magic, and all that remained was to break the anchor out, the cable already being hove short.

A part of the crew manned the capstan bars, a fiddler being perched on the capstan head. "Heave round the capstan," came the order, and with a patter of bare feet, the clanking of the pawls, and the merry lilt of the fiddle, the cable came inboard.

"Up and down," shouted a man stationed for'ard, meaning the anchor has left its muddy bed. "Now, then, my hearties, heave and away!" And to an increased pace the anchor came home.

A medley of other orders, unintelligible to me, followed; the sheets were hauled well home, the braces and bowlines made taut, and by the peculiar gliding sensation that followed I knew the *Gannet* was under way.

The old town of Portsmouth appeared to slip past our larboard quarter, and presently the ship was lifting to the gentle swell, as, close-hauled, we headed towards the English Channel.

Thus commenced the three years' cruise of my first ship, His Majesty's ship *Gannet*, and I soon accustomed myself to the routine, showing a keen interest in the duties of a midshipman; and ere long I could vie with my messmates in the most hazardous tasks that fell to their lot.

The *Gannet* first sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar to the Mediterranean Sea, for the purpose of keeping an eye on the Algerine rovers, who had again begun, in spite of the sharp lesson taught them by Admiral Blake, to molest peaceful traders. From the Mediterranean we sailed across the Atlantic to the Indies, to make our headquarters the town of Port Royal in Jamaica, an island that Penn and Venables had seized from the Spaniards some five years before.

CHAPTER VI--Of the Finding of Pedro Alvarez, and of the Strange Tale that he Told

On arriving at Port Royal Captain Poynings decided that the *Gannet* should be refitted. Accordingly preparations were made to overhaul the ship thoroughly ere she joined her consorts in a cruise amongst the Antilles for the purpose of destroying those hornets' nests of buccaneers that made the Caribbean Sea a terror to law-abiding seamen.

Our task was rendered doubly difficult, first by the oppressive heat, and secondly by the fact that, like the Mediterranean, these waters are practically tideless, so that the difference between the rise and fall can be measured by the span of a man's hand.

On this account it is impossible for a vessel to be left high and dry, so the operation of cleaning her hull below the waterline is performed by "careening", or allowing her to lie on one bilge, so that the other side is raised above the water.

All heavy gear, including the guns, was taken ashore, the manual work being performed by gangs of negro slaves, who toiled and groaned under the lash of their relentless taskmasters.

To me the sight was a terrible one, unaccustomed as I was to scenes of cruelty, and I unburdened myself to the master.

"Heart alive, lad!" he replied with a careless laugh, "they are but niggers, and know naught else of life but to toil. Treat them kindly, and they'll take care to work still less. And, mark my words, lad, if ever it comes to pass that these blackamoors are freed, as Master Penn would persuade us to do, then these islands are doomed. Never a stroke will they do save under compulsion---- There, look at that!"

A crash, a loud shriek, and a babel of shouts showed that a disaster had occurred. One of the largest guns was being hoisted over the side by a combination

of tackle between the lower fore and main yards. Just as it swung outboard the sling on the chase parted, and the huge mass of metal fell into a barge alongside, crushing two negroes and tearing through the bottom of the shore-craft. Instantly all was confusion; the master gunner was cursing at the loss of his piece of ordnance, his voice raised high above the shouts of the terrified negroes, the bos'n receiving the brunt of his attack. "Dost want me to teach thee thy trade, landlubber? Is it not time that ye learned to tie aught but a slippery hitch?"

This aspersion on the boatswain's workmanship caused a fierce dispute, but this had not lasted long when it was suddenly stopped by another yell of terror.

There was another rush to the ship's side, and I saw a dozen dark forms struggling in a smother of foam-lashed water under our quarter, while the triangular fins of several sharks showed that the culminating tragedy had occurred.

Two negroes, in addition to those killed by the fall of the gun, were lost in the sudden and brief incident, yet the only remark the overseer deigned to make was: "And they cost a hundred pieces of eight but a month ago!"

In less than three days the work of dismantling the *Gannet* was complete, and only the hull and the lower masts remained. Floating some five feet above her usual loadline, the ship was towed into the mouth of a muddy creek, and there careened till the whole of the bottom on the larboard side, with the exception of the keel and a few of the lower planks, was clear of the water, disclosing a sloping wall of barnacle-covered timbers.

As the next few weeks would be spent in scraping, breaming, and pitching the hull, the officers were allowed to take up quarters ashore, and right glad was I to have the chance of having a spell on dry land after so long and arduous a time afloat.

Port Royal was at that time in a state of considerable excitement, for in the castle, heavily ironed, lay five notorious buccaneers, who a week before our arrival had been brought in by the *Assurance*, of thirty-eight guns, after a desperate resistance. They had been condemned to die; but, owing to a slight difference between the admiral and the governor of Jamaica, their fate was yet undecided, the former wishing to send them to England to grace Execution Dock, the latter desiring to gratify the inhabitants of Port Royal by stringing up the prisoners in front of the castle. So hot had waxed the dispute that the matter was referred home, and already a swift vessel had left for England to obtain His Majesty's decision on the matter.

On the third evening of our spell ashore we were walking across the plaza, or open square, fronting the quay. The sun had set, and, with tropical suddenness, daylight had given place to darkness.

"What is that--guns or thunder?" suddenly exclaimed Drake, pointing seaward. The horizon at one particular spot was illuminated by distant yet bright

flashes of light, while a subdued rumbling smote our ears. Other passers-by were also attracted by the sound, and knots of people quickly began to collect on the side of the quay, gazing intently towards the south.

For over half an hour the flashes continued, and it was soon evident that an engagement was taking place, the noise of the firing gradually coming closer.

Several of the more timid inhabitants made for their homes, where, we afterwards learned, they began to hide their valuables. Others, arming themselves with a medley of weapons, hurried to the fortress, from which a gun was fired and then lanterns hoisted as a signal when a vessel was expected.

In response to the gun, three companies of musketeers, with drums beating and matches burning, marched from their quarters to the fort, followed ten minutes later by a large body of pikemen, their arms glittering in the light as they passed by the huge wood fires that had been hastily kindled on the battlements.

"Hasten, Aubrey! Our place is on board the *Gannet*," quoth Drake, and alternately running and walking we hurried out of the town, crossed the causeway over the marsh, and arrived at the mud dock, where the vessel lay.

Here, too, was activity and commotion. Captain Poynings was already on board, directing his officers, while gun after gun was dragged over greased planks to the ship's side, there to be "whipped" aboard by heavy tackle.

All night we worked like slaves, sending up topmasts, yards, and rigging, shipping stores and ammunition. In eleven hours of darkness the *Gannet* was almost her former self, for, being the only warship on the station (the rest being, as I have mentioned, away amongst the Antilles), the governor had sent orders that no exertion was to be spared in getting her ready for sea.

While we worked, all kinds of rumours and reports reached us. First one would come with a tale that war was declared with the Spaniards, or the French, or the Dutch, or else all three. Another would arrive breathless, saying that all the buccaneers of the Indies were off the port, and that our fleet had been worsted. Yet another came with the information that only one battered and shattered ship had arrived during the night, the sole remnant of an English squadron, and that a hostile force had landed at a spot a few miles to the east of the town.

To all these wild rumours Captain Poynings paid but slight heed. Work was to be done, and pressing work too; yet with such a spirit did the men take to the task, without need of threats of rope-ends, such as the masters of other king's ships are wont to use, that our record has never yet been equalled.

At break of day we could gather some true facts of the state of affairs. Under the guns of Port Royal lay a small armed merchant vessel, the *Whitby*, of ten guns, sadly shattered about the hull. In the offing were five ships that many recognized as belonging to one Lewis, a renegade king's officer, who, attracted by the glamour of easily acquired wealth, had seduced his crew from their allegiance and turned

buccaneer. Joined by several others of like nature, Lewis had collected a squadron of seven swift vessels; but the *Assurance* had captured two of the ships, and Lewis, with four of his fellow rogues, formed the party of captives whose fate now hung in the balance as they lay in irons in the castle.

The *Gazelle*, a consort of the *Whitby*, had been captured and sunk by the buccaneers that night; but after a long running fight the latter ship had managed to make Port Royal in the darkness, this being the cause of the firing we had heard.

Captain Poynings lost no time in preparing to float the *Gannet* out of her mud dock, though it was evident from his puckered brows that he had doubts as to whether the increased weight on board would prevent the ship from coming off.

Nevertheless he could not have completed the task of fitting out so hurriedly if every piece of ordnance had to be brought off to the ship in barges or lighters after she was afloat, so he resorted to the hazardous expedient of careening her still more.

Our best bower anchor, with its great twenty-inch hempen cable, was carried out towards the centre of the harbour, the tail of the cable remaining on board. All the guns were run over to the larboard side, so that the *Gannet's* lower-deck ports were within a few inches of the surface of the water, her draught being thereby lessened. Two additional cables were carried from the quarters to opposite sides of the creek, where gangs of negroes were directed to pull their hardest.

It was an anxious time. The capstan clanked slowly round as the main cable tautened and came in foot by foot; the negroes, the sweat glistening on their ebony arms and backs, bent to their task, encouraged or goaded by the shouts of their overseers.

Slowly the *Gannet* moved towards the open water and freedom, her keel ploughing through the liquid mud and causing a regular turmoil of yellow foam within the little dock.

Gradually she gathered way till her bow projected beyond the entrance to the creek, then, as if gripped by a powerful hand, she brought up and stopped immovable.

The master, wild with rage, called upon the seaman to take soundings, and, this being done, it was found that the *Gannet* was held by the heel, the forepart being well afloat.

"Give the men breathing space, Master Widdicombe," said the captain, as he saw the panting forms of his men. "Another effort and we are free."

"Not I, by your leave, sir," retorted the master. "Let the vessel settle but a minute and this mud holds her. Pipe the men aft," he shouted, and in obedience to the shrill cry of the bosn's mate's whistle the whole ship's company, including the officers, assembled at the waist, save the men who manned the capstan bars.

"Now, ye blackamoors, haul away!" yelled the master to the crowd on the banks. "More beef into it, bullies," urged the bos'n to the capstan men, and, as the strain on the cables increased, the rest of the crew, in obedience to an order, doubled along the sloping decks, as well as they were able, towards the bows, the whole vessel trembling with the motion.

This manoeuvre was successful. Hardly had the body of men reached the foremast when the *Gannet* glided forward and entered the deep waters of the harbour, the two ropes on her quarter trailing astern, and the mob of excited negroes who had manned them were shouting and dancing on the banks of the creek.

The *Gannet* brought up on her shortened cable, sail was hastily made, and away we went southward in chase of the buccaneers.

As we cleared the mouth of the harbour we perceived their ships nearly hull down; but with every stitch of canvas set, and withal a newly cleaned hull, we rapidly lessened the distance between us.

That they suspected not the presence of a king's ship in Port Royal was evident in that they made no attempt to sheer off; instead, they beat up towards us till we could clearly make them out.

Then, as if aware of our formidable character, they turned, two making away to the north-west, two to the south-east, while the fifth, though she showed her heels for a time, backed her main-topsail and hove to.

She was a long, rakish, yellow-sided craft, evidently built for speed, and her audacity puzzled us mightily; but knowing the diabolical cunning of these freebooters, we were determined to take no chance of a surprise.

We were almost within range when her maintopsail filled and she was off, following the direction of her two consorts who had made towards Hispaniola.

As we watched her there were signs of a struggle taking place on board--pistol-shots rang out, and a heavy form plunged over her taffrail. Instantly several men rushed to the stern and opened fire on the object, which, so many of our crew declared, was a man swimming. This it turned out to be. Amid a hail of shots that churned up the placid water all around him a man's head appeared, and the swimmer, using powerful strokes, made directly towards us.

"It seemeth strange that he escapes their fire," remarked the bos'n, as the swimmer bobbed up and down amid the splash of the shot. "We may pick him up. Away there--prepare a bowline."

"I believe they do not try to hit him," replied the master; "or their gunnery is far worse than yesterday, when they hulled the *Whitby*. But he will never reach this ship alive. Look!"

Following the direction of his finger, we perceived the dorsal fins of two enormous sharks as they cleft their way towards the swimmer; but, frightened by

the splash of the shots, they contented themselves by swimming in large semicircles between us and the fugitive.

Interest in the buccaneering vessel was for the time being entirely lost, all our crew watching the efforts of the swimmer, as with tireless stroke he quickly lessened his distance from the *Gannet*.

In obedience to an order from the captain our men cast loose a pair of swivel guns, for it was evident that the buccaneer was getting out of range, and her shots no longer disturbed the water. Far from destroying the man, the discharge of her ordnance had proved his salvation; so our captain resolved to act likewise and plant shot after shot close to him, so as to frighten off these tigers of the deep, while our men waved encouragingly to the swimmer.

Through the drifting smoke from our ordnance I caught momentary glimpses of the fugitive. He was swimming strongly, yet easily, and without any sign of either physical or mental discomfort. By this time he was so close that I could see the flash of his eyes between the matted clusters of dark hair that covered his brows.

The sharks still kept off; our gunners ceased to fire, and the running bowline was dropped from our catheads for the man to be hauled on board, when, within fifty yards from us, he suddenly disappeared, and over the spot darted yet another huge shark that, unobserved, had lurked under our bows.

We could see the monster turn on its back to seize its prey. There was a snapping of jaws, and the sea around it was discoloured with blood. An involuntary cry of horror broke from us; then, to our surprise, we saw the man reappear, brandishing a sheath-knife, while the shark, in its last throes, floated belly uppermost, a skilful thrust of the knife having practically disembowelled it.

In another minute the man had grasped the bowline, and with the knife between his teeth he was drawn up to the fo'c'sle.

He was a short, ungainly personage, probably a Dago, judging by his dark, olive skin and raven hair. Unconcernedly he drank a dram which was given him; then, with the moisture draining from his clothes as he hobbled across the deck, he was led off to be questioned by our captain.

During this episode the buccaneer had shown us a remarkably clean pair of heels, so that nothing short of an accident to the crowd of canvas she was carrying could ever make us hope to overhaul her.

But in spite of enquiries Captain Poynings gathered little from the rescued man.

"Me Portugee, me Portugee; me honest; me no rogue. Me see Senhor Capitan alone, den me tell him ebberything," he reiterated.

"I will not talk with you alone," replied Captain Poynings sternly. "You are a pirate or an accomplice of that rascally crew. Now, give an account of yourself,

or a taste of the cat will make you speak."

At the mention of the "cat" the man's eyes glittered ominously, then, instantly relapsing into his subservient manner, he jabbered in broken English:

"Me no rogue. Me Pedro Alvarez of Habana. By de Virgin me speak truth!" And holding a small wooden crucifix that hung from his neck, the man kissed it with exaggerated fervour.

"Me speak only to Senhor Capitan. Tell him ebberything. Senhor Capitan much please wid my tale."

"No!" roared Captain Poynings, knitting his brows in that manner peculiar to him when aught vexes him.

"Vell, den, me speak to Senhor Capitan an' three odder. Pedro's tale too 'portant for odders to hear."

To this the captain assented, and the Portuguese, having been deprived of his knife, and searched for any concealed weapons he might have had, was taken below to the stateroom, whither repaired the captain, two lieutenants, and the master.

For over an hour they remained, and on coming on deck we noticed that Captain Poynings and his officers looked highly pleased, though the Portuguese still wore an impassive look.

"Send the ship's company aft," said the captain. "'Tis but right that they should know."

Eagerly the men clustered in the waist, while from the poop their gallant leader addressed them.

"Hearken, my men," quoth he. "It has come to our knowledge that a vast amount of treasure lieth hidden on a cay the bearing whereof is known only to this Portuguese. He is willing to guide us to the spot in consideration of a safe conduct to Europe and one-seventh of the spoil. By my commission His Majesty gives me power to engage in such enterprise, whereof one-tenth reverteth to our sovereign lord, the king. Be it understood that I will deal fairly with all men, dividing the residue into shares according to the regulations pertaining to treasure trove. For your part do your work with a will. Let no stranger learn and forestall our mission, and I warrant ye the purser shall pay in gold where heretofore ye had but silver."

Cheers greeted the announcement, and the men retired to discuss this matter amongst themselves. We, however, learned still more. Briefly, the Portuguese's tale was this:--

Less than ninety years ago a Spanish treasure-ship left Vera Cruz, richly laden with plate and specie. A few days after leaving port yellow fever decimated the crew, and the survivors, unable to handle the ship, ran her aground on a small cay in the Rosario Channel, between the Isla de Pinos and Cuba. The treasure was

landed and hidden, but bickerings and disease still further reduced their number, till only one man remained. He was rescued by a galliot the owner of which was Pedro's grandfather. In gratitude, the Spaniard showed his rescuer a plan of where the specie lay, the men agreeing to share the spoil. Both men were lost in an attempt to reach the island in a small craft in which they had sailed alone, so as to keep their secret, and thus all trace of the spot vanished till five years ago, when Pedro came across the rough chart and an account of the matter, which had been hidden in the rafters of his hut. Pedro himself visited the cay, saw the treasure, but was unable to carry off the stuff single-handed. He returned to Habana, entrusted six others with the secret, and fitted out a small felucca to secure the spoil.

On the voyage the little craft was seized by the buccaneers, and all his companions were murdered. Pedro alone was kept a prisoner, the pirate intending that he should pilot them when occasion served.

Never a word concerning the treasure did he say to the buccaneers, but, taking a favourable opportunity, he had left the ship under the circumstances that we had observed.

Captain Poynings eagerly examined the chart. Already the lust for gold had entered into his soul, and he was ready to hazard everything for the sake of that which had cost the lives of hundreds of men in these seas--the quest of hidden treasure.

"Bring out a larger chart, Master Widdicombe," he exclaimed, "and let us see where this island should be."

The chart was produced, and the latitude and longitude carefully pricked off, whereat Captain Poynings turned purple with rage and swore horribly.

"The villain would send us on a fool's errand," he declared, bringing his fist down on the table with tremendous force. "The position he would have us believe to be an island is in the midst of the Yucatan Passage, with nothing less than eighty fathoms."

For the moment we were all dumbfounded Visions of untold wealth were rudely dispelled.

"Bring out that rascally Portuguese, trice him up, and give him five dozen!" cried the captain, a strain of his choleric ancestor betraying itself.

"Stay!" replied the master. "I have it! This position is shown by our longitude, whereas this rough chart is of Spanish draughtsmanship. Now, taking the longitude of Madrid as zero, we find that----"

"Good, Widdicombe, you have hit it! Yet, forsooth, 'twas but your duty. Prick out, then, a fresh position, and pray 'twill be better than the last!"

A few minutes' calculation enabled the master to announce that 22° 4' N., 82° 46' W. was the corrected position, and to the unbounded satisfaction of us all it was found that it marked a small island almost in the centre of the Rosario

Channel, agreeing with the description which Pedro Alvarez had given.

As there was now no sign of the buccaneering craft, the *Gannet* put about and returned to Port Royal, there to wait until the return of the cruising squadron should set us free to pursue our adventure. For nearly two weeks we remained in suspense, Captain Poynings refusing leave for fear that a man's tongue might get the better of his discretion, till early one morning we perceived to our great joy the sails of our consorts approaching the port.

CHAPTER VII--Concerning the Treasure Island

Hardly had the fleet anchored when Captain Poynings boarded the flagship and obtained, with little ado, permission to part company. We then revictualled, took in fresh powder, and weighed, steering a westerly course till Negrille Point was well abeam. Thereupon we stood nor'-westward, passing close to Grand Cayman. Here misfortune dogged us. For days we were becalmed, the *Gannet* wallowing motionless in the oily sea within one hundred leagues of our destination. Then the dreaded "yellow jack" made its appearance amongst us, and forty men lay sick to death on the ballast, of whom, I grieve to relate, more than half died.

When the pestilence would have ended it would be hard to say, had not a favourable breeze sprung up, and on the eighteenth day after leaving Port Royal we brought up off the cay shown in the chart.

It was an island some three miles in extent, and about half that distance in breadth, a line of rugged hills running from east to west, terminating in low cliffs. Viewed from the north'ard, where we lay, the shore appeared to be flat and lined with breakers, but Pedro told us that a little creek opened out close to the western end, where a boat could make a landing in safety.

No sign of a human being could be seen, even as the Portuguese had said, yet it is passing strange how easily even a trained seaman can be deceived.

Being late in the day when we arrived off the cay, it was decided not to land till the morrow. Nevertheless, we made preparations for the expedition, provisioning the longboat and the like.

Early on the morrow we weighed anchor, and, under the guidance of Pedro, towed the *Gannet*, there being no wind, through a gap in the reef, so that her new berth was within half a league of the landingplace--though there was an inner reef close inshore, on which the sea brake, though not with such violence as on the outer reef.

In his eagerness, Captain Poynings himself took command of the landing party, though it was his duty to remain aboard. With him went the bos'n, three midshipmen, whereof Greville Drake and I were included, and twenty-five men. Between us we had but five musketoons and three pistols, the men carrying, on account of the heat, nothing but their mattocks and spades. Pedro also went as a guide, so that our party numbered thirty-one men, sufficient, indeed, to carry off the treasure--if treasure it were--in one journey.

After rowing for nearly a league, viz. a quarter of a league towards the shore, and the same distance parallel to it, the breakers preventing us from going nearer, we espied the mouth of the little cove or creek, and ten minutes labour at the oars sufficed to beach the boat in very sheltered water, the trees overhanging the banks and almost meeting those on the opposite side.

We landed and formed up on a small stretch of sand, the only clear space that was to be seen.

"Hark ye, Dommett," said the captain. "Do you stay here with the boat, and keep her off if needs be we must embark in a hurry. 'Tis now nine o' the clock; by five we will return. If peradventure we fail to do so, signal to the ship for more men. Keep eyes and ears open, and if any man shall come upon you, push off and fire your piece. Now, Senhor Pedro, lead on."

It was an exciting moment. The Portuguese led, pressing forward with marvellous agility and with the air of a man who is following a familiar track. We followed in straggling order, for the way was rough, merely allowing two men to walk abreast. Dense foliage enclosed us on either side, and, save for the noise of the men's footsteps, and the occasional crackle of dry underwood, not a sound either of man or beast broke the stillness of the forest.

The path led gradually upwards, till we emerged into a clearing, the ground rising still steeper to the foot of a low, precipitous cliff. At the base of this cliff we halted for breath, observing that all around lay masses of broken rock that had at some time fallen from the heights above. Looking backwards we could see over the tops of the trees to the sea, the *Gannet* looking like a cockboat in the distance.

On resuming our march we had to scale the cliff, which, though steep, was jagged with projections of rock, which, with strong tendrils of tropical vegetation, afforded plenty of foothold for any ordinary climber to make use of.

"A pest on these Spaniards!" exclaimed the captain angrily. "Why did they take the treasure so far inland; eh, Pedro?"

The Portuguese shrugged his shoulders. "*Qual sabe, Senhor?*" he replied nonchalantly.

The men, strapping their spades on their backs, began the ascent, the Portuguese being told to remain till half the party had gained the summit.

When my turn came I leapt with all the buoyancy of youth on to the lowermost crag, grasping an overhanging tuft of reeds and grass to gain the next step; but the reeds were as sharp as a razor, and before I realized it the palm of my hand was cut to the bone, and the blood poured in a stream down my arm and over my doublet.

The sudden pain and the loss of blood caused me to slip to the foot of the cliff, and for a time everything became blank and my head swam. Someone forced my head betwixt my knees, so that in a short space of time I felt better.

"You would do well to return to the boat," said Captain Poynings in a tone that meant no refusal. "Can you manage to find the path, or shall I send a man with you?"

I replied that I was well enough to go, and reluctantly I turned back.

Drake laid a hand on my shoulder. "Never heed, Aubrey," said he sympathetically. "'Tis better to return with a gashed hand like yours. But I'll tell you all when we come back."

Slowly I went till I reached the edge of the wood. Then I lingered, watching the party make the ascent, which they did speedily and without further mishap. Then I heard their footsteps die away as they plunged through the thick underwood, and I was alone.

The path, by reason of the numbers that had but recently passed, was now well-defined, and I had no difficulty in finding it. Dommett, the boatkeeper, received me without signs of surprise, and on telling him of my misadventure, he merely ejaculated a loud "Well done", which was a favourite expression of his, no matter what caused him to make it, insomuch that on board he was dubbed by his messmates "Well done Dommett".

However, he bathed my hand in seawater, although the salt did make it smart mightily, and, tying it with a strip of wet linen, he told me to keep quiet, so as not unduly to excite my head, which was by now throbbing like to burst.

Throughout the forenoon Dommett smoked a short black pipe incessantly, though he kept his eyes shifting, looking frequently for signals from the *Gannet* and the island, both towards the path and along the shore.

There was no sign or sound till about one hour after noon, when we both heard a faint noise like a musket being fired afar off. We listened alertly, but no other sound was heard.

"'Tis one of the men who has fallen over his piece, perchance," remarked the sailor as he refilled his pipe, ramming the weed down with his little finger.

Hardly had he made the flint and steel to work when there was another noise, like the distant crashing of brushwood. The sound came nearer, so we both stood up, the boat-keeper thrusting an oar into the water so as to keep the longboat off shore.

Nearer came the sound, till at length a man appeared, torn and bleeding, and spent with running. It was one of the *Gannet's* men--the bos'n's mate,--and, throwing himself into the boat, he lay like a log.

"Pull yourself together, man," shouted Dommett, shaking the man in his anxiety. "What's amiss? What's amiss?"

"Push off for your life!" he panted. "It's all up; we are all undone!"

This was all he could say. Nevertheless we shoved off, and waited at about a boat's length from the mouth of the creek--waited for any stragglers who might appear.

Nevertheless no more of our men appeared, though a musket was fired at us from the brushwood, followed by an irregular volley. At the whiz of the bullets, though they passed well above us, I threw myself on the bottom of the boat; but the firing had the opposite effect on the bos'n's mate, for, cursing horribly, he raised himself and seized an oar. Dommett had already done likewise, and before the volley could be repeated we were well out of range, though throughout the whole time we were under fire the man still kept his pipe firmly between his teeth.

Then they called upon me to take an oar, and feeling miserably ashamed of myself I got up, and, as well as my hand would allow, I rowed with them. By a special providence we made the gap between the reef in safety, then rowed slowly, for the longboat was an unwieldy craft, towards the *Gannet*.

The master, perceiving that something was amiss, sent a boat to meet us, and on going on board we were surrounded by the anxious remainder of the crew.

The bos'n's mate told his tale, how that the expedition came across a flat piece of ground surrounded by steep rocks, like a basin. Here, the Portuguese said, was the spot where the treasure was buried. The men laid aside their arms, took their spades, and began to dig. Three feet down in the hard soil they went, but there was no sign of the treasure. Suddenly they heard a mocking laugh, and, looking up, saw that Pedro had slipped away and was jeering at them from the top of the rocks, and, what was more, he spoke like an Englishman, without any of his former accent. Captain Poynings, maddened by the man's treachery, fired a pistol at him, but without effect. The seamen looked around for their arms to give pursuit, but these had been stealthily removed, and instead they found themselves surrounded by at least a hundred armed scoundrels, who demanded that they should yield themselves. The bos'n's mate, however, having separated himself from the rest, took to his heels and fled for the boat, hotly pursued by half a dozen of the villains. He gained the longboat in safety, as I have said, and the

fate of Captain Poynings and his men was still a mystery.

Shouts and threats came from the crew of the *Gannet* when they heard that their beloved captain and their comrades had been treacherously trapped. Some proposed that all hands should form an avenging landing party, but of this our lieutenant would not hear, as the nature of the island would be against open attack.

Several plans were discussed, with no good result, till there came a seaman, who offered to track the villains and try and discover the fate of our comrades. He was of New England, having joined us at the Bermudas on our voyage hither, and was skilled in savage warfare and woodcraft, for at one time he had been a member of the trainband of Salem, in New England, which town had oft been in jeopardy from the savages.

"Let me but land after it is night," said he, "and I'll warrant ye'll see me with news of some sort by noon to-morrow. If so be I do not return by that time, let the purser mark me off the books, 'D.D.' (Discharged--dead), and send what money should be owing to me to my wife at Providence, in Rhode Island."

This man's offer being accepted, and assurances given that his wishes should be carried out if he failed to return, we could do nothing but wait for nightfall.

Directly darkness set in we lowered a boat, the oars and tholes being muffled to deaden all sound. The New Englander had stripped, and had anointed himself from head to foot with a dark, offensive-smelling grease, which, he assured us, would keep him immune from insect bites, and at the same time render him nearly invisible.

Nimbly he lowered himself into the boat, where the men were waiting with tossed oars. Silently they shoved off, and were lost in the darkness; but in a quarter of an hour the boat returned, having gone as close as possible to the inner line of breakers, so that the man could with little difficulty swim ashore.

All night double watches were set, and the guns, double-shotted, were run out ready for instant use. Still, not a sound was heard to cause us alarm, only the dull roar of the surf both ahead and astern of us. It was a miserable, anxious night, for the disaster to our shipmates (we not knowing whether they were dead or alive) threw a gloom over the whole ship.

For my part I could not sleep, my hand paining me greatly, while I troubled deeply for my comrades, particularly my friend Greville Drake; so by choice I paced the deck the entire night, till with extraordinary suddenness day broke and the sun rose above the horizon.

The whole of the forenoon passed without incident, but just at midday the lookout perceived a man leaping across the rocks by the tree-fringed shore. It was the New England seaman.

Instantly a boat was lowered, and urged by lusty strokes headed straight for the shore. The man had thrown himself into the sea, and we could make out his

head and shoulders as from time to time he appeared between the white masses of foam. He was an active and powerful swimmer, and gained the boat in safety, though probably it was well that the breakers had subsided somewhat.

His tale was soon told. Fearing to follow the path from the cove, since the villain might have set a guard there, he made his way through the undergrowth directly towards the centre and highest part of the island. Over and over again he had to attempt a fresh passage, the thickets proving too dense even for his accustomed skill. At length he came across a small stream, which he followed to its source, which afterwards proved to be not far from the spot where our men were surprised.

Here he concealed himself till daybreak, when he found himself practically overlooking the whole island. On the south side, opposite to where we were lying, he espied a cove, off which was anchored a craft which he declared was the same vessel as we had chased, and from which Pedro had thrown himself. Another hour's careful tracking brought him close to the creek, where he saw our comrades being escorted on board by the buccaneers in gangs, twenty-seven all told, so that they were apparently all alive and well. Then he made out a party of men coming down from the hillside, where they had been posted as rearguard, and with them was Pedro. They passed quite close to where he lay hid, and he could swear that Pedro was no more a Portuguese than he was.

Directly this last body of men embarked the sails were shaken out, and the swift buccaneering craft stood seaward. Having made sure that they had all embarked, the man returned by the beaten path, striking the north side of the island at the cove where we had landed. Thence he skirted the shore till we perceived him and sent off a boat.

The officers now debated as to the best course to pursue--whether to follow the buccaneer, which, undermanned as we were, was hazardous and reckless, or to return with all haste to Port Royal, report our loss, and join with the rest of the fleet in the capture of the insolent pirates.

The latter course was decided upon, but again ill fortune looked upon us. A strong southerly wind suddenly sprang up, and, though protected by the outer reef, we were on a lee shore. The master would not attempt to beat out through the gap in the reef, as his knowledge of the passage was none too good, neither could we kedge nor tow the *Gannet* against the wind. So we had perforce to remain weatherbound for seven long days, knowing full well that the same breeze that kept us prisoners within the reef was bearing the buccaneers away in safety.

When at length the wind veered sufficiently to enable the *Gannet* to sail close-hauled through the surf-encompassed passage, all plain sail was set, and back to Port Royal we sped.

Four days later the *Gannet* dropped anchor in the harbour, and with despon-

dent mien the remaining officers went ashore to report the loss of the captain and his men. To their unbounded astonishment and delight they heard that Captain Poynings and his twenty-six companions were alive and well on board the *Lizard*, man-of-war, then lying off the castle.

Their adventures can best be described in the story that Drake told to me on the evening of the day that they rejoined the *Gannet*:

"You must know, Aubrey," said he, after telling me of their capture and forced embarkation on board the buccaneer's ship, "that this Pedro was in reality a Cornishman, and second in command to the renegade Captain Lewis, then lying under sentence of death at Port Royal. The whole of this bad business had been carefully planned by the villain, and easily we fell into the trap. Three days after we left the island the *Sea Wolf*, for such is the name of the buccaneer's ship, hove to in sight of Port Royal, and with the greatest audacity Pedro, or Red Peter, to give him the name he is generally known by, went ashore under a flag of truce, taking me with him as hostage. Would you believe it, he went straight to the castle and demanded to see the governor! Oddsfish! And his impudence took even the governor aback. 'I have on board,' quoth Red Peter, 'twenty-five officers and men of his Britannic Majesty's ship *Gannet*, not including this youngster (meaning me) and another; you have Captain Lewis and four other of our men. So, my lord, I think you'll see we hold a good balance in hand. Now, sink me! 'tis a fair exchange: give us the five and take your enterprising' (how he sneered when he said this) 'king's men unhurt, or else, for every man of ours who dances at the end of a rope, five of yours shall dangle from our yardarm. Come now, your answer?'

"What could the governor say? He gave way so easily that Red Peter spoke again. 'And, taking into consideration our great magnanimity, 'twould not be amiss to grant a free pardon to us all; then, for our part, we do agree to cease from plundering and fighting, and become honest men once more. Right glad would I be to see Falmouth once more other than with a hempen rope round my neck, or with gyves and manacles to prevent my full enjoyment of my native place. How say you, my lord?'

"After all, I verily believe the governor was content, for he had succeeded in ridding the Indies of these buccaneers, even as it was ordered, though the manner of the fulfilment thereof was hardly as he had wished. So he sent for his secretary, ordered him to write out a general pardon, which he sealed and delivered to Red Peter with an elaborate bow, whereat the rogue as courteously took his leave.

"The same day the *Sea Wolf* came into the harbour and landed our people, Lewis and his companions were released, and, after a general carouse on shore, the ship sailed to communicate the news to her consorts. All the same, the trick was neatly done, and little harm came of it."

Such was the tale that Greville told. Years later I learned that both Captain

Lewis and Red Peter returned to England and were received by His Majesty, who, with the same generosity as he showed towards Captain Morgan, Colonel Blood, and other cutthroats of like nature, restored to Lewis his commission; while Red Peter, under his real name of Peter Tregaskis, became a red-hot Tory squire in his native Cornwall.

However, to resume my story, Captain Poynings rejoined the *Gannet* without delay, and after a year or so of comparatively uneventful sojourning in the Caribbean Sea, we received orders to proceed again to the Mediterranean.

CHAPTER VIII--Of an Encounter with an Algerine Corsair

The *Gannet* was bowling along under easy sail some fifty miles south of Majorca. Three years of seatime had made a great difference in her appearance. Her speed was retarded by the presence of a thick vegetable growth on her bottom, her sails had lost their pristine beauty, while her sides, though often repainted, bore signs of the effect of torrid heat and the buffeting of the waves. Her crew, too, had undergone considerable changes; wounds and disease had reduced the number of her gallant men, while those who were left were now well-seasoned and disciplined.

Of the ship's officers only three had gone to their last account--the master, who had fallen a victim to the dreaded "yellow jack", and two of the midshipmen. Thus, including myself, there were but five midshipmen on board, all of whom were as efficient as Captain Poynings could desire.

I was now nearly seventeen years of age--bronzed, hardy, and well-grown--and would easily have passed for twenty.

On this particular day it was about noon when the lookout reported a sail hull down on our starboard bow. In less than an hour she had apparently sighted us, for she altered her course so as to make straight for us. Now this was an

unusual occurrence, as the stranger must either be a hostile craft or else a ship in distress and wishing to communicate. Her speed was too great to justify the assumption that she was requiring assistance, so all hands were piped to quarters. After months of inaction the prospect of a fight acted like magic.

The officers held a consultation, and as it was well known that a Barbary corsair had been committing several acts of exceptional violence, hopes were entertained that the stranger would prove to be that particular vessel.

Our captain showed himself to be a tactician as well as a fighter. "If this be the Algerine," he said, "her speed will enable her to make off when she finds out who we are. It remains, therefore, to trick and entice her to us. See that all our ordnance is run in and the ports closed. Keep nearly all the men out of sight, and run the flag of Sicily up to the peak. And you, Master Bennet," he added, addressing our newly made master, "lay me the *Gannet* close alongside the stranger and your duty will be done. Now, gentlemen, to your stations, and God save His Majesty King Charles!"

The work of transforming the man-of-war into a seemingly peaceful merchantman was quickly performed, and long before the corsair (for such there was no doubt she was) came within range the *Gannet* was floundering along with yards badly squared, for all the world like a helpless trader, her course having been previously altered as if she were intent on running away.

But on board everything was different. At each of her guns on the starboard side were men lying prone on the deck, waiting for the signal to trice up the ports, run the guns out, and deliver a crushing broadside. Powder, shot, and buckets of water were placed close at hand, while boarding axes, pikes, cutlasses, muskets, and pistols were lying about ready to be seized when required.

The men themselves were in a state of suppressed excitement, talking softly to one another, and with difficulty restraining themselves from taking a view of their enemy and thus exposing our strength.

The officers, hidden under the break of the poop, had donned their buff coats, head- and back-plates, and plumed hats, and were as impatient as the men to get to quarters.

My station, with young Drake, was on the gundeck, yet I could not resist the inclination of creeping aft and looking at the Algerine through one of our stern ports.

She was now tearing along at a tremendous pace, barely a quarter of a mile astern. There was a stiff breeze blowing, and she was being propelled by oars as well as by sails; yet a stern chase is always a long one.

Thinking us an easy prey, she made no hesitation in showing her true colours, while groups of dark-skinned men, the sweepings of the Barbary ports, clustered on her high foc's'le, yelling and waving their arms in a truly terrifying

manner. The sounds of the oars, the rattling of the chains of the miserable galley slaves, and the sharp crack of the whip of the merciless taskmaster could be distinctly heard, while ever and anon a gun would be fired, merely to impress upon us the fruitlessness of resistance.

At length she drew up about fifty yards from our starboard quarter, and even at that short distance they did not scent danger, their eagerness blinding them to the fact that twenty-five closed ports separated them from a death-dealing hail of iron.

I ran back to my station. The word was passed round to fire high and spare the slaves. All along the main deck there were groups of men standing in almost total darkness, waiting at the gun tackles for the signal to run out the guns. The feeble glimmer of the fighting-lanterns shone on the glistening arms and bodies of half-naked seamen, who stood in almost deathlike silence listening to the shouts of their unseen foes.

Suddenly came the order to fire. The ports were triced up, and brilliant sunshine flooded the gundeck. With the creaking of the tackles and the rumbling of the gun-carriage wheels, the muzzles of the iron monsters were run through the ports. There was no need to take aim, for the vessels were almost side by side. The volley that followed shook the *Gannet* from keel to truck and filled the deck with clouds of smoke.

Back ran the guns with the recoil, sponges and rammers did their work, and again the guns roared--this time in an irregular broadside.

Four times was this repeated, the guns' crews working as calmly as if at practice. How it fared with the pirate we knew not. Occasionally, between the clouds of smoke, we could catch a glimpse of her black sides, crushed and torn by our broadsides. A musket ball came in through an open port and struck a seaman fairly between the eyes. He fell without a sound, and this was the only casualty on the main deck. Seeing he was dead, two seamen dragged him across to the other side and pushed his body through a port. A bucketful of sand was sprinkled on the spot where he fell, and the gun at which he was stationed was run out again.

Suddenly there was a crashing, grinding sound. The master had laid us alongside the corsair.

"Boarders, away!" was the order, and, hastily closing the ports, to prevent our being boarded in turn, the whole of the men below poured on deck, armed with whatever weapon came first to their hands.

The vessels lay side by side, locked in an unyielding embrace. Our ordnance had wrought havoc on the corsair, her huge lateen yards lying athwart her decks, while heaps of dead and dying men encumbered her slippery planks. But the remnant still resisted, and for us the completion of our victory was to be dearly

bought. We had already suffered considerably, many men having been slain on our fo'c'sle and poop, and now, headed by our gallant Captain Poynings, we threw ourselves upon the foemen's deck, where we met with a desperate resistance. The corsairs knew that surrender meant an ignominious death, and fought with the courage of despair, calling on Allah and Mohammed as they slew or were slain.

Inch by inch they were driven back, pistolled or cut down or thrust overboard, till there remained but one Moslem, a tall, wiry villain, armed with pistol and scimitar. Two of our men went down before him, one having his skull cloven by a lightning sweep of the corsair's razorlike blade, the other having his sword arm cut completely through at the wrist. Two more rushed at him; one he shot, the second received the discharged pistol full in the face. With that several men made ready to shoot him down; but our lieutenant called on them to desist, and he himself advanced on the redoubtable Moslem.

The combat was watched with breathless interest, for Geoffrey Weaver was a past master in the art of fencing, having acquired both the French and Italian methods, as well as having seen active service against Spaniards and Turks, and also in the Low Countries. In a measure he had an advantage, wearing his breastplate; yet as the scimitar is rarely used save for cutting, the armour did not serve him as readily as it would have done if he had been pitted against a man armed with a pointed sword.

Their blades met, and so quick was the swordplay that none could follow it. In a few seconds both were wounded, the blood trickling down the lieutenant's face from a nick on the forehead. Then, quicker than words, Weaver escaped a sweeping blow from the scimitar by jumping nimbly backwards, and the next moment his blade had passed through the Moslem's shoulder.

With this, thinking the fight at an end, we began to cheer lustily; but our triumph was shortlived, for, ere the lieutenant could disengage his weapon, the corsair seized him round the waist and sprang with him into the sea.

We rushed to the side, but only a few bubbles came to the surface. Carried down by the weight of his armour, Weaver sank like a stone, and his implacable foe, holding on with a relentless grip, shared his fate.

However, there was no time for vain regrets, and all hands were set to work to repair the damage done by the fight. Our losses were heavy: besides the lieutenant, two midshipmen, the bos'n, and sixteen men were killed, and the purser and thirty-three men wounded.

On the Algerine all her crew were accounted for, not one surviving; while, in spite of our care, the losses amongst the galley slaves were fearful. A few stray shots and a shower of splinters had wrought destruction on these helpless chained-up wretches, and the gratitude of the survivors when we knocked their fetters off was touching to witness. There were Spaniards, Genoese, Venetians,

French, and Dutch, negroes, and one Englishman, a man from Hull--twenty-three all told, most of whom were wounded.

The prize was badly shattered, but little damage was done near the waterline. The *Gannet* suffered hardly at all, the corsairs, being unprepared for resistance, having neglected to use their two pieces of brass ordnance.

The bodies of the dead were committed to the deep, the wounded attended to, and the decks cleaned of their ghastly stains, while a party of seamen were placed on board the prize to rig jury masts.

When I went down below, to clean the grime of the powder from my face and hands, I found that I had received a slight cut on the calf of my leg. How or when it was done I could not remember, but it was too trifling to be attended to by the surgeon, so I dressed it myself.

While thus engaged I was sent for by the captain, and on reporting myself he said:

"Master Wentworth, I have been fully satisfied with your conduct in the fight, and although you are young in years you have a man's head on your shoulders. You will now have your first command, for I propose to put you in charge of the prize with seven men to work her. You must keep in company with the *Gannet* till off the Barbary coast, where you will have to shape a course for Tangier, which now belongs to His Majesty King Charles. Should we be compelled to part company, I will rely on you to work the ship into that port. You can, of course, use a sextant?"

I assented.

"Very well, here is a plan of the harbour of Tangier. This place," indicating the mole, "is where you must bring up. Now go to the master and get the necessary charts and instruments, and take charge of the prize as soon as possible."

I saluted and left his cabin, feeling inclined to dance for joy, yet having sufficient dignity left to walk sedately across the quarterdeck.

When I gained the gunroom I told the news with unrestrained enthusiasm, and my remaining companions, now reduced to two in number, Greville Drake and Alan Wood, though not slow in offering their congratulations, did not conceal the fact that my good fortune was their disappointment.

By nightfall the fitting of the jury masts was completed, the shot holes were plugged, and the working party was recalled. Then, with my seven men, together with two of the liberated slaves, I took possession of the prize, having, with Captain Poyning's permission, named her the *Little Gannet*.

CHAPTER IX--I lose the *Little Gannet*

Throughout the first part of the night we held on our course, the poop lights of the *Gannet* acting as a guide. Watches were set, five men in each, I taking my turn in the first watch. Towards morning the wind veered round and blew freshly from the west'ard, and when the sun rose, a watery orb, the wind increased into half a gale.

We saw the *Gannet* shorten sail, bowling along on the starboard tack under easy canvas to enable us to keep up with her. I ordered additional preventers to be rove, had the hatches battened down, and took every possible precaution to ensure the safety of my vessel.

By midday it blew a furious gale, accompanied by showers of blinding rain, and before long the *Gannet* was nowhere to be seen. Even with her jury rig the *Little Gannet* gave a good account of herself, though it was necessary to take an occasional spell at the pumps to keep down the water that made its way through her hastily patched seams.

From her build and rig my craft would lay closer to the wind than the *Gannet*, so I ordered her to be kept on the starboard tack for two hours, then on the larboard tack for another two hours, and so on, hoping by these means to keep within sight of our escort when the gale moderated.

There were, as I have mentioned, five men in each watch--one of the two liberated slaves, a Genoese, who spoke no English, being in mine, while the other, a negro, was placed in the second.

This negro was of a gigantic stature, with powerful limbs, yet of a timorous disposition, so that directly the gale came on he could with difficulty be made to do any work at all, but lay in a heap in the weather scuppers, moaning and muttering in broken English, Spanish, and his native tongue.

All that day the gale continued, but on the morrow the wind moderated, leaving us rolling in the trough of a heavy swell, with no sign of the *Gannet*.

About nine in the morning we spied a sail on our starboard quarter. This we concluded was the *Gannet*, which we had evidently passed during the night; but three hours afterwards we could see that it was not our parent ship, but a smaller and speedier craft.

She had already perceived us, and had altered her course slightly to come up with us, and, with every stitch of canvas set, she ploughed her way rapidly towards us.

It was without doubt a hostile craft, but the knowledge that the *Gannet* was somewhere close to us, though where we knew not, spurred us to make every preparation for flight or fight.

By four in the afternoon the stranger was a mile astern, and with the aid of a glass I could see her colours--they were black, and bore the emblem of the Jolly Roger.

I gathered my slender crew aft and exhorted them to make a desperate resistance, telling them that a tame surrender would be as futile as capture after a determined fight. In either case the result would be death to us all, but the longer we held out the greater chance there was of a timely rescue by the *Gannet*.

They one and all expressed their willingness to resist to the last, and now commenced one of those despairing fights against overwhelming odds that were only of too frequent occurrence. Many a gallant English vessel has met her fate in a glorious but unrecorded effort in similar circumstances, her end unknown at home and her disappearance soon forgotten, save by those bloodthirsty scoundrels who have felt the fangs of an Englishman at bay.

We immediately manned one of the long brass guns, training it right aft on the advancing pirate. I directed the gunner to aim at the foeman's spars, endeavouring to cripple her aloft. With a flash and a roar the iron missile sped on its way, striking the pirate's topsail yard. There was a shower of splinters and the broken spar fell, till brought up by the strain on the topsail and t'gallant sail, and at the same time the halyards of the foresail parted, bringing that sail down to the deck with a run.

Notwithstanding our danger a cheer broke from us; but before we could reload our gun the pirate yawed and let fly with her larboard guns.

The result was disastrous to us. Two of our men were killed on the spot and two wounded, while both our jury masts went by the board, and the *Little Gannet* lay helpless on the waves.

The end was not long in coming. After another broadside the pirate backed her main topsail and hove to at less than a cable's length off. Two of her boats were lowered, and a swarm of bearded ruffians tumbled into them and pushed off towards us.

Resistance was hopeless, but the pirate appeared anxious to take us alive,

and, partially stunned by a blow from a handspike, I was thrown into one of the boats and taken on board our captor, where, together with five survivors, I was placed under guard on her quarterdeck.

The pirate ship was called the *Friend of the Sea*, but she was the enemy of all who sailed upon it. She was heavily armed and manned, her crew comprising a ruffianly assortment of every nation of south-western Europe, and, judging by the gold ornaments that every man wore, their cruise had been highly successful for these rogues.

They were busily engaged in transferring the cargo of the *Little Gannet* to their own vessel. Much of this consisted of valuable stores that the Algerine had on board when we took her, and the satisfaction of the lawless freebooters was unbounded.

The two brass guns were also taken on board, the work of slinging them from the *Little Gannet* to the boats, and thence to the pirate ship, being performed with a celerity and skill that would have drawn an expression of admiration from the lips of Captain Poynings himself.

When the whole of the valuable stores were safely on board, the pirates fired their prize, and an hour later, burned to the water's edge, my first command sank in a cloud of smoke and steam.

The pirates worked unceasingly. Their next task was to repair the splintered foreyard, which they did by fishing it with capstan bars and small spars. While this work was in progress there was a shout from the lookout, and from the hurrying scrambles of the crew I guessed that another sail was sighted.

Hastily sending the spliced spar aloft, the crew squared the yards once more, and the *Friend of the Sea* gathered way. From where I was I could not tell whether we were chasing or in chase; but in a few moments we had other things to think about, for the pirate captain and his lieutenant approached us.

The former was a short, broad-shouldered man, with a heavy, black beard. He was dressed in typical buccaneering rig, with a red sash round his waist, in which were stuck a whole armoury of pistols and a short Turkish dagger. Cruelty and viciousness were stamped upon every outline of his face, but at the same time there were signs of a courageous nature and resource. He was apparently a Genoese or a Tuscan, and did not, or would not, speak English, though he understood our replies in the subsequent discourse we had with him.

His lieutenant was a taller man, also heavily bearded, and bronzed with the sun. In spite of myself I gave an exclamation of surprise, for he was none other than the man with the scarred face who had tried to rob me on the Portsmouth road over three years ago, and who had escaped from Colonel Middleton's troopers in the Forest of Bere.

The recognition was mutual, and from the look of intense hatred on the

man's features I knew that my fate was sealed. The two pirates conversed volubly in an unknown tongue, then the renegade Englishman turned towards us again.

"Listen, men," he said, addressing my companions in adversity. "Join us and you'll have a life that cannot be beaten. Light work, a fair share of fighting, and plenty of booty. In two years you'll be rich enough to buy the best inns in England, and can live like gentlemen to the end of your days. Refuse, and----" Here he jerked his thumb significantly in the direction of the entry port.

"And as for you, you white-livered young cub," he added, addressing me, "our captain here has given you to me, and, let me say, Dick Swyre will be avenged. I'll have a little way of my own that will make you wish that his end at the hands of the hangman were yours. Now, my lads, what do you say? Wilt join our merry crew?"

The men who were appealed to were not long in making up their minds. Tom Black and George Wilson firmly and emphatically refused, and their example was followed by the two remaining Gannets--Dick Blake and a man whose name I knew not, he being always called Old Shellback. The fifth was the blackamoor who had been a galley slave. He, miserable cur that he was, assented with alacrity, and was sent for'ard to join the rascally crew.

My four men were led away, and for a time I was left to myself. I was still dizzy from the effects of the blow I had received, and this probably accounted for the complete indifference that I felt with regard to my fate. My wrists and ankles were tied, making it impossible for me to move, save by crawling and worming along the deck.

The pirates were still busily engaged in making preparations for the coming fight, and from the general direction of the glances that they made I came to the conclusion that the *Friend of the Sea* was in this case the fugitive. So busy were they that I edged towards an arm-rack, and, placing my bound wrists against a sharp cutlass, I succeeded in freeing them from the cords that bound them. This done, it was an easy matter to loose the ropes that fastened my ankles; then, lying in a position that hid my limbs from any passing pirate, I tried to form a plan of escape.

I could, of course, leap through a port into the sea, taking my chance of being picked up by the pursuing craft, which I fondly hoped would be the avenging *Gannet*; but I did not know what distance separated us, and even then, in the eagerness of the chase, there was little likelihood of their noticing me, still less of heaving to and picking me up.

Suddenly I thought of the foretop. If only I could reach that I could defy the whole of the pirate crew, and at the same time render material assistance to their foes. Now that I was free, my lethargy vanished, and I was the personification of active revenge.

Taking advantage of the confusion I ran for'ard, and before I was recognized I had gained the nettings and was well on my way up the shrouds. A hoarse shout announced that my escape was discovered, and a pistol bullet buzzed close to my head, quickly followed by another, that flattened itself against a chainplate.

I redoubled my efforts, and, racing over the futtock shrouds, I gained the top, where I threw myself down, panting and almost exhausted.

CHAPTER X--How I Defended the Foretop

For full five minutes I lay motionless, listening to the zip of the bullets as the pirates kept up a hot fire on my perilous position. Then I raised myself and peered cautiously over the edge of the top.

The situation was a grave one, but I had a fighting chance. I was on a platform some ten feet square, but the lubber's holes reduced the standing room by nearly a quarter. The after side of the top was protected by a mantlet of stout wood, while the sides were fitted with a low breastwork.

Where I was lying was thus fairly secure. The only danger was that I might be picked off by musketeers in the maintop or crosstrees, the foremast itself protecting me from any shots from for'ard. The planking of the top also was stout enough to resist a musket ball, though the thud of shots as they struck the under side of the top at first filled me with misgiving.

After firing for some time the rascally crew apparently came to the conclusion that they were doing too much damage to their own sails and rigging, the fore-topsail being holed in many places; so I could look around in comparative security.

The tops were to be utilized by sharpshooters in the coming fight, for to my delight I found a whole armoury stowed away on the foretop--muskets, pistols, cutlasses, and two sharp axes, with plenty of powder and ball. Had I delayed my desperate plan much longer the top would have been filled with men. I examined the muskets and the pistols and found them already loaded. I next turned my

attention to the deck of the pirate ship. The guns' crews were at their stations, and were either looking astern or else regarding my position. The captain and his scarred-faced lieutenant were almost speechless with rage, for they knew that for the time being I held the trump card.

Not a sign could I see of my four men, but presently the wretched negro was hauled out, a knife was thrust into his hand, and by shouts and dumb-show he was ordered to go into the rigging and bring me down.

The recreant blackamoor was almost mad with terror, his skin turned a dusky-greyish hue, and his eyes rolled about in an agony of fright. Behind and below him were the knives and pistols of the pirates, above him was I, covering his trembling body with a pistol that I steadied against the edge of the lubber's hole.

Slowly he climbed till, urged on by the shouts of the fiendish crew, he reached the futtock shrouds. Here he stopped, and in a low, agonized voice he whispered: "No shoot, Massa; only pretend to shoot! Me come to you; me help you! No shoot me!"

Seeing that this man would be useful in the defence of the top, I fired, the bullet passing well over his head. He then climbed up hurriedly, till his head and shoulders were through the lubber's hole. Then with a yell of triumph the treacherous black seized my right wrist in his powerful grip, and his knife flashed in the air.

But he reckoned not on the other weapons that I had. Seizing another pistol in my left hand, I fired point-blank at his head.

Through the smoke I saw the gaping hole cut by the ball, his grip relaxed, and he fell. For a brief space his body hung suspended on the inside of the futtock shrouds, then it slowly over-balanced and crashed with a heavy thud across a gun carriage on the deck below.

A loud yell came from the pirate crew, and once more a heavy fire was opened on the foretop, but, lying snugly under the shelter of the mantlet, I remained in perfect safety. The only chance they had of bringing me down was by training a piece of ordnance on the top; but either they did not possess a cannon capable of being elevated to that height, or else they feared that the damage done would be greater than the success of getting rid of me.

When the firing ceased I again looked over the edge of the breastwork, the deadeye lanyards making me practically invisible from the deck. Cautiously taking a musket, I thrust its muzzle over the edge and aimed at my particular enemy, the scarred-faced pirate and smuggler. I fired, and though I missed him, the bullet struck the pirate captain in the back, and he fell to the deck. Leaving him where he was lying, the lieutenant took refuge on the aft side of the mainmast, cursing at me in a lusty voice.

Encouraged by my success, I opened a steady fire on the crew, and in a few moments the whole of the deck that was visible from the foretop was deserted.

But only for a time. Groups of men made their way towards the foremast shrouds, holding thick planks of wood over their heads. Under these rude mantlets they made preparations for storming the foretop, some making for the weather shrouds, others for the lee.

Seizing one of the axes, I attacked the lower rigging vigorously, cutting through shrouds, slings, braces, and halyards, everything that came within reach, thus making my position secure from escalade.

The *Friend of the Sea* was sailing close hauled on the starboard tack, and as I continued my work of destruction I could see the head sails coming down, while, deprived of its principal supports, the foremast swayed and creaked ominously.

In spite of the frantic efforts of the helmsman, the pirate ship flew up into the wind, her maintopsail was taken aback, and she was hove to in a helpless state.

Then for the first time I could see the *Gannet* coming down on the *Friend of the Sea*, the sun shining on her clouds of weatherworn canvas.

Having the weather gauge, she soon ranged up and opened fire. Why she had not done so before I could not understand, till a crowd of the pirates came for'ard, dragging with them my four men. While the chase lasted they had, so I afterwards learned, suspended their prisoners over the stern, thus preventing our humane captain from opening fire; but, now the chase was at an end, there was no further use for the doomed men.

Blindfolded, and with their arms tied behind their backs, the unfortunate men were marched to the entry port and pushed into the sea in sight of their comrades, who were powerless to prevent yet ready to avenge their deaths.

Both ships were firing rapidly, the shot from the *Gannet* whistling through the pirate's rigging and crashing through her hull at every broadside.

Though overmatched both in number and weight of guns, the *Friend of the Sea* fought bravely, and from my elevated position I could see the men stricken down by dozens, yet their fire was vigorously kept up.

Being sure that escape was impossible, the *Gannet* devoted all her attention to the hull of her foe, at the same time shortening the distance between them.

Now through the drifting smoke I could distinguish the crew of the *Gannet*. There was Captain Poynings standing unmoved amid the crash and din of the fight, the master standing by the wheel, his head bound with a blood-stained scarf, several men, still in death, encumbering her decks, while amid the throng of excited fighters a continuous procession of wounded was winding its way towards the main hatch.

Finally both vessels came within a few yards of each other, and I heard the order given: "Prepare to board!"

The pirates had now abandoned their guns, and had begun to cluster for'ard, under the shelter of the bulwarks, each man armed with pistol and cutlass. They knew what the issue meant, and each man prepared to sell his life dearly.

As the crash came, and the two ships were interlocked, the Gannets, headed by their gallant captain, poured over the hammock nettings and gained their enemy's deck. Every inch was grimly contested, several of the *Gannets* falling between the two vessels and meeting a miserable fate by being ground between the heaving sides.

Captain Poynings singled out the scarred-faced lieutenant, and, being well ahead of his men, his position was for a time one of considerable danger. I watched the fight without fear of being made a mark by the pirates, who were too hard pressed to heed me. The sight held me spellbound, till I observed one of the pirates covering our captain with a musket. The man waited, with finger on trigger, till the position of the combatants would give him an opportunity to fire without injuring his leader.

Seeing this, I grasped a loaded musket, and at fifteen yards' distance put a ball through the villain's head. Almost at the same time Captain Poynings ran his opponent through the arm, and the latter, jumping backwards, turned and ran towards the hatchway.

Then came a cry, from which side I knew not: "The magazine! the magazine!" and immediately the captain shouted: "Back, men, for your lives!"

There was a rush for the shelter of the *Gannet*, and, realizing the danger, I crept along the foot-rope of the foreyard, gained the foreyard of the *Gannet*, and thence made for her foretop. Once there I lost no time in descending to the deck, heartily thankful at treading the planks of a British man-o'-war once more, though my return in the confusion was unnoticed.

The fighting was practically at an end, the *Gannet* being busily engaged in trying to free herself from the pirate's embrace, and keeping back the frenzied rushes of the doomed crew.

When the last grappling was severed, the *Gannet* swung slowly round, her flying jibboom still entangled in the pirate's bowsprit shrouds. Suddenly there was a blinding flash, followed by an appalling roar--the desperate villain had fired the magazine.

Luckily the *Friend of the Sea* had by this time used nearly all her ammunition, so that the explosion, though disastrous to herself, did us very little damage.

Before the debris flung high in the air by the explosion had fallen, the pirate ship had sunk beneath the waves, taking our flying jibboom and part of the jibboom with her, while a heavy pall of smoke covered the place where a moment before she was lying like a wounded animal at bay.

Now that all danger was past, the effects of the hardships I had undergone

began to tell. I was faint, weary, and hungry; my clothes were in rags, my hands blistered, and my face blackened with powder. However, I made my way aft to report myself.

There was no sign of Captain Poynings on the quarterdeck, so I went towards his cabin. As I passed underneath the break of the poop I came face to face with young Greville Drake.

He stood stockstill for a moment, his eyes starting from his head in terror, till, realizing that I was flesh and blood, and not a phantom, he gasped: "Good heavens, 'tis Aubrey Wentworth back from the dead!"

Seeing I was like to fall, he took me by the arm and led me below. "But I must report myself," I said.

"Then report to me, Aubrey."

"You? Why not the captain?"

His answer was a suggestive jerk of his thumb towards the cockpit hatch, where the grim procession of mangled seamen still continued.

"What!" I exclaimed. "Is Captain Poynings down?"

"Yes; struck down at the last of the fight, and so are all the other officers. In me you see the senior unwounded officer, and as such I am in command of the *Gannet*."

It was only too true. Our gallant captain had been hurled to the deck by a piece of falling timber from the doomed ship. The lieutenants were all either killed or dangerously wounded; the master, though he remained at his post during the engagement, had fallen through loss of blood; and the purser, who took his part in the fight as bravely as the rest, had had his left arm shattered above the elbow.

With the crew the mortality had been fearful, while hardly forty men were uninjured. With an undermanned, severely damaged ship, it was a question whether we should ever reach port again. Only a continued spell of fine weather would guarantee our safety.

Having washed, changed my ragged garments, and eaten a hearty meal, I went below to the cockpit.

Here, lighted by the dismal glimmer of a few ship's lanterns, a ghastly sight met my eyes, while a hot, fetid stench filled the gloomy region like a cloud. Stretched upon rough wooden trestles, or huddled in rows upon the bare deck, were dozens of human beings, some moaning, others shrieking and cursing in their agony.

Our surgeon was about to operate upon a little powder-monkey, a lad of about fifteen years of age, who had received a ball in the shoulder. Lying by the lad's side was his father, whose leg had just been removed, the pitch with which the stump had been smeared still smoking. In spite of the pain caused by the rough-and-ready surgery, the father grasped his son's hand, encouraging and

comforting the boy, as the surgeon probed for the bullet.

At length I found Captain Poynings. He, refusing the comfort of his own cabin, preferred to share with his gallant crew the horrors of the cockpit, and lay, with his head and shoulders swathed in bandages, on a rough mattress, as if he had been an ordinary mariner.

Added to the dismal noises came the dull thud of the carpenters' hammers and mallets as they drove plugs into the shot holes betwixt wind and water, while the creaking of the ship's pumps betokened that she was leaking freely.

On going on deck I found that, as the next officer fit for duty after Drake, I was put in charge of the starboard watch, and had to take my share in the responsibility of navigating the *Gannet* to the nearest port.

This happened to be Gibraltar, which we reached after thirty-six hours of anxiety and arduous labour, and when the *Gannet* dropped anchor off the mole our feelings were those of relief and thanksgiving.

I accompanied Drake on shore to pay a visit to the Spanish authorities, asking them to afford us assistance in refitting. This request was readily and courteously granted, and during our stay, extending over three weeks, we had frequent opportunities of visiting the famous rock.

My companion often called my attention to the fact that military discipline seemed very lax at this great fortress; so when, forty-one years later, it was captured by a *coup de main* by Admirals Rooke and Shovel, the news of its falling an easy prey to us did not come as a great surprise.

At length the *Gannet* was again fit for sea; our captain was well enough to take command, and on the tenth day of September, 1663, we sailed for the shores of Old England.

CHAPTER XI--Of the Manner of my Homecoming

Bad weather dogged us during our homeward voyage. Crossing the Bay of Biscay we were battened down for three days, and, save on one occasion, I did not go on deck the whole time the storm raged.

That occasion called for every available hand, for the securing bolts of two of our deck guns had broken adrift, and the huge ungainly weapons charged to and fro across the ship, carrying destruction in their passage. After strenuous efforts the guns were secured, but at a cost of four men washed overboard and five injured, either by the heavy seas that came tumbling inboard, or else by the wild career of the derelict weapons. After the gale came a fog, so thick and continuous that for two days we could scarce see the end of our jibboom.

Captain Poynings, after deliberating with the master, came to the conclusion that land was not far off, but the weather did not allow of the use of either sextant or quadrant. The lead, then, was our only guide; so a man was stationed in the chains, and minute-guns were fired in the hope that we might hear an answering and reassuring sound.

With the first cast a depth of thirty fathoms was obtained, and shortly afterwards the fog cleared, disclosing a bold headland on our larboard bow.

"Land! land!" was the cry, and amongst the men for'ard there was almost a wrangle, some affirming that the headland was the Start, others the Lizard or "The Bill", while a few sanguine men expressed their belief that it was the coast of the Wight.

"Keep the lead going," shouted the master, as the fog again swept down upon us like a pall, shutting us out of the sight of the land we so eagerly desired.

With great regularity the lead gave a gradual shoaling till twenty-four fathoms were announced.

Suddenly we were startled by the lookout shouting: "Breakers ahead!"

"'Bout ship!" ordered the master, and with a creaking of blocks and a slatting of sails the *Gannet* stood off on the other tack.

We could hear the dull roar of rushing water, but how far the sound came we could not determine..

"Keep her as she is, bos'n's mate," commanded the master. "Faith, as if I did not know; this is none other than the Race of Portland!"

As night came on, the wind, hitherto steady, increased into a gale, and before midnight it blew a hurricane such as had not been known for years; and to sheer off a dangerous coast we had to keep under storm canvas, though had we had searoom the master would have had the ship to lay to.

An hour after midnight our mainsail, though treble-reefed, parted with a report that was heard above the storm, the torn canvas streaming out to lee'ard like so many whips; and simultaneously our bowsprit carried away close to the gammonings, with the result that the ship yawed, then shot up into the wind.

With a shuddering crash the foremast went by the board, and we were helpless in the midst of the raging sea.

I kept close to Captain Poynings, who gave no sign of the presentiment that

the *Gannet's* last hour had come.

Rapidly we drifted shorewards, where, in the inky blackness, a line of phosphorescent light denoted the breaking of the boiling water upon an ironbound coast.

The master came aft and shouted in the captain's ear. What he said I could not tell, the noise of the elements deadening all other sound, but to his question the captain merely shook his head. Again the master appealed, pointing to the now rapidly nearing cliffs. A deprecatory shrug was the reply, and Captain Poynings, turning on his heel, walked to the shelter of the poop.

The master made his way for'ard, and, turning out some of the seamen, bade them let go the anchor. With a rush and a roar the stout hempen cable ran through the hawsepipe, the vessel snubbed, swung round, and the next moment the cable parted as if made of pack thread.

Anticipating the worst, we all gripped the first object that came to our hands and awaited the shock.

It was not long in coming. There was a crash that shook the ship from stem to stern; her keel had struck a rock. Again she swung till her bows pointed inshore. Then came another crash, the main and mizzen masts went over the side, and after one or two violent motions the *Gannet* remained hard and fast, the heavy seas pouring right over her.

By this time the day had dawned, and we could see that the ship's bows were close inshore, so that had our bowsprit and jibboom remained they would have been touching the rocks, up which the broken water dashed in a terrific manner that made any attempt to swim ashore a matter of utter impossibility.

The after part of the ship was now breaking up fast. Our gallant captain still remained on the quarterdeck, having buckled on his sword as if going into action. Grasping his speaking-trumpet he shouted his last order: "Look to yourselves, men, and God have mercy on us all!" Then came a huge, tumbling, white-crested wave that swept the doomed vessel from the stern as far for'ard as the foremast.

When it had passed, not a sign was to be seen of the brave and ill-fated captain, who, with a score of his men, had been swept against the pitiless rocks.

Clustered in blank despair on the fo'c'sle were all that remained of the once smart crew of the *Gannet*. I remember seeing the lieutenant, the bos'n, Greville Drake, and about a score of the men, but, huddled on the lee side of the bulwarks, I remained, chilled to the bone and drenched by the drifting spray, hardly conscious of my peril or the presence of my shipmates in distress.

Above the slight motion caused by the heavy seas striking the hull there came a greater shock --the *Gannet* had parted amidships.

The bos'n's voice was heard faintly above the roar of the elements, and looking up I saw that, by the breaking of the ship, the forepart of the *Gannet* was raised

in consequence of the 'midship portion subsiding, and that her bows were nearly level with a flat, rocky ledge but twenty feet away.

At the same time several men appeared on shore, looking at us intently, yet making no offer of assistance. We waved, making signs to them to throw a rope, but, to our astonishment, our appeals were met with a callous indifference. "You miserable wretches!" yelled the bos'n, shaking his fist in the direction of the inhospitable men. "Would I could get at you, ye cowardly landlubbers!"

Then a seaman close to me cried out: "Never a helping hand will we get from they, bos'n. I know where we be, for yon's the Tilly Whim Caves, and nought but smugglers and wreckers bide hereabouts."

Smugglers and wreckers! Instantly my mind harked back to the scene in the court at Winton, when Master Joseph Hawkes gave testimony against the two rascally Dorset smugglers.

"Now, men, bestir yourselves," said the bos'n, turning towards us. "Bear a hand with that spar, and with the help of Providence we'll save our skins yet."

The prospect of safety lashed the worn-out crew to action. By their combined efforts a fore-t'gallant spar was dragged to the spot where the broken bowsprit formed a secure support. With a hoarse "Yo ho!" the spar was thrust forward, and just as its weight was on the point of overbalancing the weight of the seamen on the inboard part, the extremity touched the edge of the rocks. With another effort it was thrust securely on to the ledge, and the bos'n, with a line round his waist, crawled carefully ashore.

The rope served as a guideline to the rest, and without further mishap the twenty-two survivors of the *Gannet* made the perilous passage, though after three years' knocking about on the high seas it was a sorry homecoming.

The inhuman spectators of our plight had vanished, and not a single being was to be seen. In our wretched and half-starved condition we were nearly exhausted; in fact, many of the seamen dropped on the ground from sheer want of strength.

The bos'n, who was the life and soul of the survivors, then picked out the more active men to explore the locality. The old seaman who had recognized the coast said that two villages were within easy distance--Worth Matravers and Swanage--though a lofty barren line of rugged hills separated us from both of them.

By this time I had recovered sufficiently to look around. We were on a flat ledge some fifty yards in length and about ten broad, thirty feet from the water, and close on a hundred from the top of the cliffs that towered above us. Running back into the cliff were two or three small caves, but there was nothing in them save a few broken barrels and a coil of rope. The ledge itself, though level, was encumbered by numerous massive boulders that had at one time fallen from the

beetling cliffs, while to the left ran a path which undoubtedly led to the top of the dizzy heights above us.

All the while the spray dashed over us, while swiftly the irresistible breakers were grinding to pieces the wreck of the ill-fated *Gannet*.

But there was no time for mournful reveries on the untimely end of our noble craft and her gallant captain, for already the exploring party had returned with the news that the cliff path had been found, and that a village was not far distant.

The sorry remnant moved forward, those whose strength failed them supported by the arms of their stronger companions.

The path was steep and rugged. After having been so long on board, and being weak in body through the hardships I had undergone, I felt weary and ill before half the ascent was completed; so, while my shipmates proceeded, I was obliged to sit down to recover my breath.

In a few moments I felt better; then, starting to my feet, I hurried after them, half running, half walking up the path.

I had not gone farther than twenty paces when my ankles turned under me, and I fell sideways, crashing into a thick bush.

Vainly endeavouring to save myself, I clutched at the bush, but the ground all around seemed to be flying upwards. The daylight gave way to pitch darkness, and I was falling, falling,...

Then I dimly remember striking on some hard substance, and with that I lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XII--The Smugglers' Cave

How long I remained insensible I cannot say, but with the return of my senses I found myself lying on some warm, soft substance, though what the object was the gloom did not permit me to ascertain.

The darkness was intense, and for some time I imagined it to be night, till the remembrance of my fall gradually dawned upon me. Once I thought I was dead,

and pinched my limbs to make sure that I was not. My head throbbed terribly, while my wet clothes struck a chill that was still more striking by reason of the coldness of the hole or cave into which I had fallen.

Then I moved my hands around to try and discover my surroundings. The object on which I was lying was an animal, which, though motionless, was either stunned or recently dead, for its body was still warm.

As far as my arms could reach I could touch nothing else save the floor, which appeared to be of smooth rock. Then I looked upwards, where, far above, a dim light flickered through a hole which was wellnigh covered with brushwood. The light was not sufficient to illuminate the bottom of the pit, the hole being, I imagined, some thirty feet in depth.

Here I was, then, in a kind of natural bottle dungeon or "oubliette", such as I have often seen since, both on the Spanish Main and in our own country. In fact, it can be well likened to the dungeons of the castle at Newark (which was dismantled by the rebels), where a dismal hole some twenty feet below ground is only accessible by a rope ladder dropped through a narrow opening above.

How, then, could I escape? Climbing was an impossibility, so I staggered to my feet and began a round of exploration, carefully shuffling one foot in front of the other for fear of some hidden pitfall, making towards the sound of water trickling from the roof, a sound that seemed a long way off.

Presently my outstretched hand touched a wall of rock. Turning to the left, I followed the direction of the wall, which, for a cave, was very regular. At length my left hand touched a rock; either I had reached a corner of the cave, or this was a pillar of detached stone.

Carefully feeling with both hands, I discovered that I was standing in an angle, and right in the corner my hand came in contact with an object that, on inspection, proved to be a gun; also, by the smoothness of the barrel I knew that it had recently been in use, there being no rust on the ironwork.

This discovery cheered me, as the cave would before long be visited by the owner of the piece. Taking the musket in my hand I felt the pan, removed the powder from it, then cocked the hammer. On pulling the trigger the flash of the flint gave a tolerable illumination. This action I repeated several times, till I could form some idea of the cave.

In the part opposite where I was standing I saw more weapons, several large casks, and bundles of what looked like woollen and silk goods.

Then the truth flashed across my mind: I was in one of the storehouses of the Tilly Whim smugglers!

Replacing the musket where I found it, I made my way cautiously towards the barrels. Here I felt about carefully, till my hand alighted on an opened box of coarse biscuits, which served as a meal, as I was wellnigh spent with hunger.

Then, after a drink from the water that trickled through the roof of the cave, I resumed my tour of inspection.

Groping on, my knees came in contact with a large wooden box. Its contents were apparently hay and straw, but curiosity prompted me to plunge my hand through the upper surface, and it was no surprise to me to find that underneath was a thick layer of silk. The box or crate was some six or seven feet in length and three in breadth, the depth being about the same as the breadth; so its contents must have been worth several hundreds of pounds.

While engaged in my investigations I heard the sound of footsteps and voices. The smugglers were coming to their storehouse!

There was not a moment to be lost, and rapidly making up my mind, I burrowed underneath the hay and straw, and concealed myself on the layers of silk.

The sound of shuffling feet drew nearer, there was a noise like the throwing back of a curtain, and the cave was flooded with a subdued daylight.

The men feared no interruption, for they were singing a lusty song in broad Dorset dialect, the chorus of which ran:

"He used to laugh a horrible laugh,
His fav'rite cry was 'Priddys',
His life he held in his own right arm,
His soul was Cap'n Kiddie's!"

Often in my younger days had old Henry Martin and Master Collings told me tales of a buccaneering Captain Kidd and his bloodthirsty henchman, a renegade Scotsman called Angus Priddys, whose career was ended at Execution Dock; so I formed a conclusion that these smugglers were men whose illicit dealings were not the worst of their accomplishments.

Through a knot hole in the side of the box I could see the whole of the rascally crew.

There were about thirty, all well armed and dressed in usual mariner's style, save that two or three wore smocks. Several carried beakers on their shoulders, while two bore between them a small but heavy chest. They had evidently had a successful haul, for all were in high spirits, and the chorus of their gruesome song echoed along the walls of the cavern. The refrain was interrupted by one of the men exclaiming that their stores had been disturbed, and a search commenced which might have ended with my discovery but for the fact that in the far end of the cave, immediately underneath the funnel through which I had fallen, lay the dead body of a fox, whose body had broken my headlong descent. Deeming this a satisfactory explanation for this interruption, the rogues resumed their carousing.

I could now see how near I had been to regaining my freedom, for just

beyond the place where my tour of exploration had abruptly terminated was the entrance to the cave, skilfully hidden by a heavy screen of painted canvas that, even at a short distance, would deceive all who were not acquainted with the secret.

For nearly an hour the smugglers devoted themselves to a reckless carouse, till at length their leader called for silence. With a discipline that is rare amongst such people, the gang sat down on barrels and rough stools and awaited their captain's orders.

In the broad Dorset dialect their leader recounted the various successful runs they had made, as if vainglorious of their deeds, and finished by demanding: "Be there any of ye as be not content with his share?"

Their answer, with one voice, was "No". "Then," resumed the speaker, "if so be as that ye are all content, how comes it that one of ye must needs taake bloodmoney from the gaugers? And how comes it that dree[1] of our'n have been stuck wi' a Bridport dagger?"[2]

[1] Dree=three, still used in Wilts and Dorset.

[2] "Stuck wi' a Bridport dagger".--A local witticism meaning to be hanged, Bridport being noted for the manufacture of hempen rope.

The smugglers looked at one another in amazement. Clearly there was a Judas amongst them.

"Stand out, Ned Crocker!"

There was a scuffling in the farther corner of the cavern, and presently a man was roughly hauled out into the centre of the assembly. I could see him distinctly; he was a little, under-sized apology for a man, with sharp, pointed features, a nose resembling a bird's beak, a loose, weak-natured mouth, and small, shifty eyes. His complexion was dark, almost of a dirty yellow, while his face was covered with blotches and pimples.

In his terror his skin turned almost a greyish white, while his thin legs, which struck me as being too weak for even his undersized body, were bent and shaking like a reed in a March gale.

Several of the rogues hurled imprecations at him, but their leader silenced them by raising his hand.

"I bain't a done nothin'!" cried the miserable wretch.

"I don't know as 'ow ye've been taxed wi' aught," ejaculated the captain, "but I'll do it now. Look you, Ned Crocker, have ye at any time been unfairly done by? No? Then why did ye blab on the run we made nigh Dancing Ledge, when Thompson, John Light, and Long Will of Corfe were taken?"

"'Tweren't me, maaster!" answered the rogue sturdily and doggedly, though

his bearing did not fit with his manner of speech.

"Not ye? Ah, now harken! Know'st Jim Harker, the court-leet man and king's officer at Wareham?"

A shake of the head was the only reply, though the accused man shook more violently than before.

"No? Then methinks ye'll know him no more on this earth, for he's dead!"

The speaker paused to mark the effect of his words, then he continued:

"An', what's more, we killed him close to Arishmell Gap. 'Twas his own doin'. But on him we found this. Now, being no scholard, I ax Master Fallowfield to read what's on this paaper."

Master Fallowfield, who, as I afterwards learned from the conversation, was the parish clerk of Worth Matravers church on Sabbaths and holydays, and an arrant smuggler at other times, took the paper and read in a sonorous voice a message from a neighbouring justice to the ill-fated James Harker, telling him that the reward due to the informer Crocker would be paid at any time after Martinmas.

A deathly silence, broken only by the short gasps of the doomed wretch, followed this announcement.

"And the sentence is----?"

"Death! Death!" shouted the smugglers with no uncertain voice. Crocker made a desperate effort, shook off the men who advanced to hold him, and, flinging himself down before the captain, clasped his knees and begged for mercy. In a second, however, his executioners sprang upon him and bound him hand and foot, and a scarf was fastened over his eyes. One of the men drew a pistol. I watched the scene, for the moment unmindful of my dangerous position, but drawn by an indescribable feeling to watch the last moments of a doubly-dyed rogue.

Slowly the pistol was raised till its muzzle was level with the doomed man's temple. I could even see the smuggler's finger resting lightly on the trigger, while his eyes were turned towards the leader as if awaiting the signal to fire. The remainder of the rascals looked on impassively, as if thoroughly used to this kind of rough-and-ready justice.

But the fatal signal never came. The captain signed for the pistol to be lowered, the bandage was removed, and the culprit, already half-dead with fear, was told that he was pardoned conditionally.

Without waiting to hear the conditions, Crocker lurched forward and fell heavily to the ground in a dead faint.

"Hark ye, George Davies! When yon lubber comes to himself, tell him to make hotfoot for Lyme, and put hundreds of leagues of sea betwixt him and us. If he says nay, keep him safely till we return."

Once more the drunken revels were resumed, and again the rollicking chorus, for the men would sing naught else, echoed through the cave:

"He used to laugh a horrible laugh,
His fav'rite cry was 'Priddys'!"

Gradually the dim light of the cave diminished, and I knew that night was falling. Torches and lanterns were lighted, and still the smugglers kept high carnival.

Suddenly, above the noise of the revellers, came a shrill whistle, and as if by magic the din of merrymaking gave place to an almost oppressive silence.

Again the whistle was repeated--like the cry of some bird of night--and one of the smugglers replied with a sound like the hooting of an owl.

Then came the noise of brushwood being removed, and a block and tackle were lowered through the chimneylike aperture.

"Now, my lads, look alive; casks first."

The smugglers worked with a will. The casks were rolled under the tackle, and whipped up to the open air. Six in all were sent up, and then the men began to handle the bales. At length two of the rogues laid hands on the box of silks wherein I lay concealed. I had a difficulty in restraining myself from springing up; but with a great effort I remained perfectly quiet, though expecting every moment to find a knife passed through my body, or a dozen rough hands seize me in their merciless grip.

"Be this one to go?"

"Bide a bit. I'll ax."

The footsteps died away and came again.

"Yes, Charlie, up with it!"

"What a weight!" muttered one man with an oath. "Here, Dick, come here a moment and bear a hand. Who'd a thought as that silk be so weighty?"

"Is the straw agoin' too?"

My heart was literally in my mouth.

"No; but stop! P'raps it'll save questions being axed, and straw's cheap enow."

I felt myself being lifted with my luxurious bed and carried across the floor of the cave. Then slings were fastened round the crate, the tackle creaked, and I was on my way to the open air, the box rubbing and grinding against the sides of the shaft in its ascent.

CHAPTER XIII--The Escape

Strong hands seized the box and lifted it on to a cart, the rough springs of which shook alarmingly as they felt the weighty load.

Then came a hurried discussion as to the destination of the booty, some, including the parish clerk, Fallowfield, who had gained the upper regions by means of the tackle, urging that it had best be taken and placed in the tower of Worth Church, the others insisting that it would be best to make one journey do, and convey it as close to Wareham as possible, where their accomplices could make arrangements for its distribution.

The latter argument prevailed; a heavy tarpaulin was thrown over the cart, a whip cracked, and we were off. I could hear the sound of the brushwood being replaced and the rough farewell greetings of the smugglers, and, by the jolting of the cart and the muffled noise of the wheels, I knew that the route lay across a grassy down.

Presently I became emboldened sufficiently to clear away the material that prevented an outlook through the hole in the woodwork of the box. But my task was unavailing, for it was night, and the darkness so intense that nothing could be distinguished.

For quite half an hour the cart jolted over the sward, then the wheels struck the hard surface of a road, and the pace became quicker but more even.

There were but two men with the cart, and their conversation was carried on in a series of short sentences spoken in the broadest Dorset dialect.

Presently a low oath came from one of the men, and the cart was dragged off the roadway and hidden in a hollow, or such I thought it to be.

Wondering at the cause of this, I heard the sound of horse's hoofs coming nearer and nearer; then, with a deafening clatter on the stony road, the animal passed by, and the sounds died away in the distance.

"It be 'e, sure enow," muttered one of the men.

"Yes, it be. Howsoever 'e bain't seen we, so let's get the cart back to t' roaad."

Who the mysterious "'e" might be I could not discover; one of the king's officers, perchance, though in this lawless district they rarely ride alone.

The task of getting the cart back to the roadway was longer than the men had reckoned upon, and when at length they succeeded, one remarked in a breathless voice that dawn was breaking.

Soon the light was sufficient for me to see out of my spyhole. We were descending a steep hill, and on one side towered a lofty down, round which the white mists of morning still hung like fleecy clouds.

"'Tis no use to go to Wareham," remarked one of the men. "We'd be stopped, sure as faate."

"That's so," replied the other. "There's but one thing to do."

"What's that?"

"Leave the stuff at Carfe and take caart home."

"Where?"

"Where! Why, in the castle, ye dolt!"

Soon the cart was being driven through a village street. I could see the houses distinctly. They were all built of stone, and most of them were roofed with stone as well. This, then, was Corfe, or Carfe, as the inhabitants call it.

Here a thought occurred to me to spring from my hiding place and make a dash for freedom, but the weight of the tarpaulin, which was securely lashed down, prevented me; so I was perforce obliged to remain, though firmly resolved to free myself at the first favourable opportunity.

The cart proceeded on its way, and passed through a wide marketplace in the centre of which stood a cross. Then it rumbled over a stone bridge and entered the courtyard of the castle.

Corfe Castle was well known by reason of its stubborn defence against the malignants during the Great Rebellion, Lady Banks having all but successfully withstood a lengthy siege when rank treachery did its fell work.

On the fall of the fortress it was "slighted" by order of Old Noll himself, and the keep and walls were blown up with powder. So strong was the construction of the masonry that the work of destruction was only partially done, though the keep was riven from base to summit, and several of the smaller towers were thrown bodily out of plumb.

This much I had heard from report, and now, in spite of my cramped position, and faintness from want of food, I could not help looking with interest on the shattered walls, which still showed the black marks of the powder, though now, after a lapse of twenty years, their barrenness was beginning to be hidden by a kindly garb of ivy.

The fear of sorcery and witchcraft was firmly fixed in the minds of the Dorset peasantry, and in consequence few would venture amid the grim ruins

by day, still less by night, so the smugglers' hiding place was practically free from interruption.

The cart came to a sudden stop in an archway under the keep, and, with a hurried warning: "Look alive; the sun's nearly up", the men proceeded to unfasten the tarpaulin. This was done, the canvas fell in a heap on the ground, and the men began to unload the straw.

The time for action had arrived. With a bound I sprang from the cart, nearly overthrowing the astonished men, who yelled with terror, as if his Satanic Majesty had suddenly appeared.

I did not stop to think in which direction I should run, but started off towards a gap in the walls. Passing through this, I found myself on a steep bank, at the bottom of which a white chalky road led towards a town some miles away, the towers of whose churches were plainly visible in the morning light, while away to the right was a large expanse of water which I guessed correctly was the harbour of Poole.

Descending the steep, grassy mound at a breakneck pace, I gained the road and headed northwards, keeping the sun on my right hand. After running a quarter of a mile or so, and finding no signs of pursuit, I slackened my pace and walked, the effect of my prolonged fast being very evident.

An hour later I was crossing a long causeway close to the town. Here I met a cowherd, who looked at me in astonishment, my clothes being in rags and covered with wisps of straw, while my face, blackened with dirt, was surmounted by a crop of ruffled hair that did duty for a hat.

In answer to my question he told me that I was in Wareham, and a few minutes afterwards I was sitting in a bakery, eagerly devouring a half-loaf and a cup of milk that a kindly baker provided for me.

Seeing that I was utterly exhausted, he allowed me to lie down in front of his oven, and, in spite of the hardness of my couch, I slept soundly till midday, when I was aroused by Greville Drake and some of the late crew of the *Gannet*, who were being entertained in the town till they could be conveyed to their homes.

I was, however, too ill to be moved; so the kindly baker, hearing my story, and being informed of my rank, had me put to bed in his own house, where later in the day a magistrate attended to take down my depositions as to the gang of smugglers.

That night I got worse, and for three weeks I lay betwixt life and death with an ague brought about by the cold and exposure.

Then one morning I awoke to find my Uncle George sitting by my bedside. The kindly little man had heard of my being ill at Wareham, and had immediately travelled posthaste to my side.

From that day my recovery became rapid, and in less than a fortnight I could

sit up.

One afternoon, as the late autumnal sun was sinking in the west, I heard the tramping of feet and the clanking of fetters. My uncle helped me to the window, and on looking out I saw the whole gang of smugglers, save two who had preferred death to capture, being led through the town on the way to Dorchester Jail.

Fortunately I was spared the ordeal of attending the trial, but I heard that the gallows or transportation to the West Indies accounted for the whole of the rascally crew, against whom the barbaric crime of wrecking, as well as smuggling, was proved right up to the hilt.

It was late in December, in clear, frosty weather, that we started on our homeward journey, proceeding by easy stages through Wimborne, Ringwood, and the New Forest to Southampton, and on the last day of December of the year 1663 I arrived at Portsmouth again, after an absence of over three years.

CHAPTER XIV--I Set Out to Fight the Dutch

I must now pass over a space of a year, there being but little of interest to record. All this time it must not be imagined that I had given up the quest for my father's murderer; indeed, as I grew older, my thoughts of bringing the villain to justice waxed hotter instead of waning. My uncle, Sir George Lee, and Lawyer Whitehead had each prosecuted vigorous enquiries, but all attempts to run the felon to earth had proved fruitless.

The loss of the mysterious metal box also caused me considerable misgivings, and the vague hints thrown out by my uncle at sundry times did much to increase my uneasiness on that score.

Meanwhile it seemed as if the earth had opened and swallowed both Increase Joyce and the box (for in my mind the two were inseparably associated), though I had a presentiment that I should obtain satisfaction in the end.

But to resume my story. Twelve months sped swiftly by ere my physical condition became as good as before my malady, and with the lengthening days of January I entertained great hopes of going again to sea.

Rumours of a rupture with the States of Holland were in the air, and, taking the aggressive action of the Dutchmen in mercantile matters into consideration, the prospect of a war was hailed with delight.

One day early in February I went to call on my benefactor, Sir Thomas Middleton, in the hope that he would get me appointed to a ship.

He received me kindly, but held out little hope of my desire being fulfilled.

"Would that I could, Aubrey," he remarked sorrowfully. "My whole time is spent in writing to Master Samuel Pepys praying for money to pay the arrears of both seamen and workmen. God knows, the poor wretches are hard put; but the money that should go for the defence of the realm finds its way into the hands of His Majesty's favourites. There is a new ship to be launched this month, but there is not a man belonging to her except the officers, whose work is to look about them. Never did we require cordage and hemp more than we do now. Fifteen ships now in port are making demands for rope, and what we have in store signifies nothing. The blockmakers and joiners have gone away, refusing to work any longer without money; the sawyers threaten to do the same. I am even now going the rounds of the yard, so if you will bear me company you can see for yourself to what straits we are put."

So saying, the commissioner led the way to the dockyard, past the rope-house to the building slips, where a tall vessel lay ready for launching, yet hardly a workman was to be seen. Instead, a mob of women and children followed Sir Thomas at a distance, reviling and cursing the king, the commissioner, and the navy in general by reason of the non-payment of their husbands' and fathers' wages.

"Faith, 'tis hard on them," remarked Sir Thomas; "but for foulness of tongue they out-vie the daughters of Billingsgate. Now, we'll make for yonder workshop, for there will be found the only reliable men working in the dockyard."

But alas for the commissioner's hopes! On entering the shop he found that, instead of being diligently employed, the men were listening to a heated discourse from a malcontent from another part of the dockyard. This last straw raised Sir Thomas's ire. Seizing a stout cudgel from one of the men, he struck out right and left at the astonished party till bruised and cut pates became the order of the day. Then, having thoroughly cowed the malcontents by taking more pains in the use of the stick than in any business for the last twelve months (as he afterwards expressed it), he sent for the guard and clapped three of the ringleaders in the stocks.

"You see, Aubrey," he exclaimed on our return to his house, "how I am put upon. Though I would gladly serve His Majesty in great and small matters, yet how can I when the lack of money hangeth like a millstone round my neck? As for you, the moment I can get you a vessel I'll do my utmost, but, as things are, I

can hold out but little hope."

I thanked him and withdrew, feeling sick at heart at the prospect of a life of idleness when I might be serving the king at sea.

Towards the end of February news came that war had been proclaimed against the Dutch, and the beating of drums and the firing of cannons welcomed the announcement. What ships there were in the harbour weighed and sailed for the Downs, to join the fleet that lay there under the command of the Duke of York. Disconsolately I watched their departure, regretting the fact that I was unable to take a part in the coming struggle.

As time wore on, news of sanguinary naval engagements reached us, while occasionally a Dutch vessel would be brought into the harbour, her ensign hoisted beneath the cross of St. George, and her crew battened down in the hold.

The captives were invariably taken to Porchester Castle, a building of immense strength that lay on the shores of Portsmouth harbour, some four miles away by water.

Spring came and went, yet to my great mortification I was not sent to join a ship, though in the interval I engaged in a private venture--a few gentlemen of Hampshire having fitted out a small vessel to prey upon Dutch merchantmen. But the task was not to my liking; little renown was to be gained, and after three weeks I was glad to return home.

One evening in June I went down to the Sally Port, as was my wont, to look towards Spithead, in the hope of seeing part of our victorious fleet return. The guard had been doubled since the declaration of hostilities, and every vessel and boat that made for the harbour was vigorously searched.

"Ah, Master Wentworth," remarked the captain of the guard, who dwelt not far from us in St. Thomas's Street, and whose acquaintance I had made some time back, "our town hath other enemies to fight besides the Hollanders!"

"Oh!" I ejaculated, in a manner that implied that I wanted to be further enlightened.

"Yes, 'tis true. The Dutchmen we can fight man to man in a straightforward manner, but our latest foe is not to be conquered by strength of arms--'tis the plague!"

"The plague?"

"Yea. From Southampton comes news that the plague is in that town, and eight houses are shut up. Sir Thomas Middleton hath given orders that the shipwrights who dwell there are not to be allowed to go home, and those already living there are not to be readmitted to the dockyard. Furthermore, the poor there will not suffer the rich to leave, neither doth our governor permit ships from Southampton to land their cargoes here."

Here was grave news. I hurried homewards and communicated the captain's

information to my uncle. He shook his head sorrowfully.

"The plague is rampant in London. In Chichester eleven persons have died. At Newport there have been two cases, yet in this town we are free, though in dire straits. Still, Aubrey, let not a word escape to alarm your aunt. I must see that we lay in a goodly store of brimstone."

Throughout the long sultry summer we were mercifully preserved from the contagion; then, as autumn came, and still the plague did not appear amongst us, people began to think that with the approach of the cold weather all danger was past.

But this was not the case. Winter drew on, and with it the cold was intense, a sharp frost lasting for over six weeks.

Towards the end of December the *Essex*, man-of-war, came into port, and hardly had she moored alongside the jetty when the report spread about that she was infected with the dread disease. Immediately there was a panic amongst the workmen, and, throwing down their tools, they betook themselves off, vowing that neither the king nor the king's enemies would make them resume work till the *Essex* had gone.

Finding threats and entreaties useless, the commissioner ordered the *Essex* to moor in the centre of the harbour. This was done, but rumour had it that at midnight the bodies of eight men, victims of the plague, were taken ashore and buried secretly in the Pest House fields.

Two days afterwards it was known that three more of her crew had died, and were buried on the foreshore at Gosport; while, to disinfect the ship, great quantities of brimstone were burnt, but to no purpose.

Then, strange to relate, the plague broke out in Gosport town, whither some three hundred men pass over every day to work in the dockyard, so it was not surprising to learn that at length the dreaded scourge had appeared in our own town.

With fierce violence it spread. Many houses were shut up, their doors marked by a cross with the words "God have mercy upon us" written underneath. At first passers-by would cross in fear and trembling to the other side of the street whenever this mournful sign met their eyes, but as the number of cases increased people became hardened to the danger.

Many put the cause of the disease, rightly enough, to the filthy habits of the poorer people, and hearing that salt water was a preventive, scores of the inhabitants repaired daily to the seashore, plunging into the bitterly cold waves in the hope of staving off the malady.

Day and night large fires were lighted in the streets, while, to add to the misery, the silent watches of the night were broken by the hoarse shout of the watchmen, who, ringing their bells, cried out in solemn tones: "Bring out your

dead."

All the time the war with the Dutch was waged unceasingly, till it was reported that the French, apprehensive of our supremacy at sea, joined forces with the States of Holland and declared war against us.

Early in April, to my great joy, Sir Thomas Middleton informed me that I was to join the *Prince Royal*, a ship of 100 guns, then lying at Chatham with the rest of the fleet under the command of the Duke of Albemarle and Prince Rupert.

"As the pestilence rages in London town," said he, "it is not meet that a man should risk an inglorious death when he would serve His Majesty better by dying for his country while fighting the Dutch. Therefore, instead of going by coach to London, and thence to Chatham by river, we are sending a shallop to Dover, whence you can travel through the county of Kent to Chatham. Several officers and men are making the passage, to bring up the crew of the *Prince Royal* to full strength, for she has had some hard knocks, and promotion is sure to be rapid should she again meet with the Dutch."

I thanked the commissioner heartily and withdrew. Having bade farewell to my friends, and gathered together my few personal belongings, I retired for the night, as the shallop was to sail at six the next morning.

On going aboard I found that not less than four officers and thirty men were packed in this little craft. To my surprise and delight Greville Drake was amongst the former, he having been promoted to lieutenant. There were also several of the old Gannets, and to me it seemed as if the glorious doings in the stout old craft would be worthily followed by the crew of the *Prince Royal*.

The shallop was but fifty feet over all, unarmed save for the muskets and swords carried by the men, and relied on her speed only for safety in case of attack.

With a fair wind the little craft tore eastwards, passing through the Looe before nine o'clock. Then the wind fell lighter as the sun rose higher, and midday found us forging slowly along off Littlehampton, on the Sussex coast.

Four hours later we had Brighthelmstone on our larboard bow, the master of the shallop keeping close inshore for fear of being attacked by a French or Dutch man-of-war. Finding, however, that there was more wind offshore, he altered the helm and stood more to the south-east.

At sunset a thick mist came on, which caused our careful and anxious master to lose his bearings. Most of us remained on deck, though the weather was exceedingly cold. As darkness set in our position became still more uncertain, and even the oldest seamen began to look alarmed.

Drake and I stood side by side conversing in low tones as we clung to the weather rails, the lively motion of the little craft making it a difficult matter to keep one's feet.

Between the gusts of wind I thought I heard a sound. Drake listened, but could hear nothing. In a few minutes the noise was repeated, several of the crew hearing it besides myself. It was the roll of a drum.

Again the sound was heard, this time nearer; but almost immediately it was answered by another faint beating, another, and yet another, till the sea seemed to echo with the rapid roll of drums.

"Stand by, lads, to 'bout ship!" shouted the master, slacking off the tiller lines. "We are across the bows of a large fleet, if I mistake not."

"God forfend 'tis not the French!" remarked Greville. "'Tis not to my liking to see the inside of a French prison."

We peered through the mist and darkness of the night, but nothing could be distinguished. Sea met mist in an undefined blur at less than twenty yards from us.

Half an hour passed in breathless suspense, then the noise broke out again, this time close ahead and far away on both quarters as well.

"'Tis no use to go about now," said I to my companion. "We are sailing right across the van of a great fleet."

The master was of the same mind, for in a few minutes he put the shallop's head more before the wind, so that she lay in the supposed direction of the invisible squadron.

Now we could hear the rush of the water from the vessels' cutwaters, the straining of the ropes and the creaking of the blocks, while the ships were continually hailing one another so as to keep in touch.

In what language they were talking we could not make out, but it did not sound like an English hail. Anxiety was stamped on all our faces, for we had to run the risk not only of collision with a vessel ten times our size, but of being taken by a French or Dutch man-of-war.

By this time the moon had risen, dispelling the darkness, though the fog hung around as thick as ever; but withal there was enough light to see the length of our craft.

Suddenly, with a swirl of beaten water, a huge vessel loomed out of the mist, her flying jibboom seeming to project right over our stern. Our master and one of the seamen flung themselves on the tiller and put it hard down. The shallop ran up into the wind and lost way, and as she did so the man-of-war thrashed by us so near that we could see the gunports of her lofty tumble-home sides, though her spars and sails were lost in the mist.

We were seen by those on board. Shouts followed the discovery, and every moment we expected to find some heavy weight crashing down upon us, or a discharge from some of her lower-deck guns; but beyond the shouting we were not molested.

We rubbed sides with the hulking ship as she shot past, and when clear of her quarter we read the name *Jeanne d' Arc* emblazoned on her stern gallery, with an elaborate embellishment of gilded eagles and fleurs-de-lis.

"Oh for a barrel of powder and a slow match lashed to her rudder pintle!" exclaimed Drake. "But stand by, here comes another!"

Such was the case, and before the *Jeanne d' Arc* was lost in the mist the bows of another vessel loomed up. By this time the shallop was wearing and gathering way, so the master ordered both sails to be lowered, a manoeuvre that was smartly executed, and as the second Frenchman passed us our craft was lying motionless on the water.

This time fortune did not smile on us, for as the shallop was on the Frenchman's lee a spurt of flame burst from the man-of-war, immediately followed by a deafening roar, and with it our mizzen mast went by the board with a terrific crash.

The shot was replied to by the nearest Frenchman, and for the space of a quarter of an hour a spirited pitched battle occurred between the various ships of the squadron, friend firing into friend in the confusion and excitement.

Though several shots pitched close to us, we escaped without further injury, and ere the echoes of the last report had died away we were far behind the now invisible fleet.

The anxiety of the master on account of the fog had vanished utterly on meeting with the Frenchmen, and with spirited promptness he set the crew to clear away the wreckage and parbuckle the broken mast.

"My men," he cried, "that fleet is none other than the forty sail of the Duke of Beaufort, who seeks to effect a junction with the Dutch! Yo ho! Straight for the nearest land we'll make now. Whether we beach the shallop on an exposed coast or bring her into port I care not, but land we must, and bear tidings hot-foot to His Grace the Duke of Albemarle."

So saying, he turned the shallop's head due north, and as daylight dawned the mist dispersed, and we found ourselves a few miles from the Kentish coast, with Rye plainly visible.

An hour later and the shallop was making her way cautiously into the sand-encumbered harbour, and, the moment we landed, the officers, myself included, obtained horses and set out for Chatham, leaving the men to follow afoot as best they might. Meanwhile the news that the Duke of Beaufort's squadron was really in the Channel had spread abroad, causing the timid inhabitants of Rye to make preparations for a hurried exodus, while the trainbands were called out by beat of drum, and had assembled in the marketplace.

Our journey to Chatham was performed without incident, though the heavy rains had made the roads a perfect quagmire in many places. Tenterden we

reached in an hour, and two hours later we were clattering through the streets of Maidstone.

At four in the afternoon five weatherworn and mud-bespattered travellers arrived at Chatham, where a rowboat took us to Albemarle's flagship, which lay at anchor in Gillingham Reach.

Honest George, as the seamen still loved to call the gallant duke, was now getting on in years and weighed down by physical infirmity, yet in time of danger his energy and fearless determination would have put to shame many a younger man. If he had had but a free hand, I warrant the disgrace of the Dutch in the Medway would never have occurred; but the baneful influence of the court beauties drove His Majesty almost to poverty, so that when retrenchment had to come it was the fleet that suffered.

The admiral received us kindly, and on receipt of our news ordered a signal to be flown recalling all officers and men belonging to the fleet who were on shore, and ere sunset the English squadron was making its way towards the Nore to chase and destroy the Hollanders' ally.

On joining the *Prince Royal* I was surprised at her size, equipment, and smartness. Practically a new ship, she was commanded by the veteran Sir George Ascue, and her crew were all men who had seen active service against the Dutch, the Spaniards, or the Barbary pirates. Compared with the *Gannet* the *Prince Royal* was as a mastiff by the side of a lapdog, while the smallest of her 100 guns was larger than the heaviest piece of ordnance in my first ship.

With a favourable wind the fleet arrived off the Forelands and thence beat up for the Downs, where we were in a position to meet either the Dutch or the French squadrons; but off Dover we learned from a fishing boat that Beaufort was seen heading back towards Brest in order to refit some of his ships, so that for the time our chances of smelling powder were very remote.

CHAPTER XV--Of the Famous Sea Fight of Four Days

During the whole of the month of May the English fleet remained cruising betwixt Gravelines and Dover, till Albemarle began to revile the Dutch for their cowardice in fearing to leave their harbours, while of de Beaufort we had neither signs nor tidings.

At length, on the last day of May, news was brought that the French fleet was actually in the Channel once more, and that de Ruyter and Van Tromp, with eighty sail, were already on the way to effect a union with de Beaufort.

A hurried council of war was held on board the flagship, and here Albemarle made the first great mistake of his life; for it is reported he held the Dutch so cheaply that he ordered Prince Rupert to take twenty vessels of our fleet and make to the westward to find and engage the French, while he relied on his remaining fifty-four ships to meet the formidable array of Dutchmen.

This counsel our captain, Sir George Ascue, ventured to oppose, but honest George in his wrath bade him hold his tongue, and Prince Rupert hastened on board his ship to detach the squadron of twenty ships in order to seek de Beaufort. Before nightfall we saw them hull down, and we set sail so as to arrive off the coast of Holland and destroy de Ruyter's craven fleet.

Craven we dubbed them; but when, on the morning of the 1st of June, we found the Dutch fleet lying at anchor, to our surprise they immediately slipped their cables and stood out to meet us, with a courage and determination that made Albemarle bitterly regret his lack of caution.

On board the *Prince Royal* all was bustle and excitement, yet our preparations were made without untoward confusion. Sir George made a stirring speech, the drums beat to quarters, and then came that irksome interval before opening fire that tells so acutely on the nerves of even the most hardened veteran.

The action began in a strong wind that, blowing athwart the tide, raised such a steep sea that most of our ships were unable to open their lee'ard lower-

deck ports, a misfortune that more than outbalanced our advantage in having the weather gauge.

When within a mile of the enemy a signal was made to shorten sail, but the hot-headed vice-admiral, Sir William Berkeley, kept on till, half a mile ahead of the rest of us, he encountered the fire of over twenty of the Dutchmen.

We watched the gallant though unequal conflict. Unflinchingly his ship received the tremendous broadsides of the enemy, and, undaunted, Sir William returned the fire, till at length the combatants were lost in a heavy pall of smoke. Gradually the noise of the struggle ceased and the smoke cleared away. Then, to our dismay, we saw the gallant vessel a helpless, dismasted wreck in the possession of the Dutch.

Now came our turn, and before we were within a comfortable distance our spars and rigging began to fall on the deck in a manner that none of us had previously experienced. The solution of the mystery was afforded shortly afterwards by three seamen being cut in two apparently by one shot, which finished up its career of death by splintering the base of the mainmast.

The bos'n, who was standing close to me, hastened to where the missile lay, and lifting it up he exclaimed: "That's where they have us! 'Tis a chain shot--a new invention of that stubborn fiend de Wit!"

We were soon hotly engaged. Dead and wounded encumbered our decks, while the new and stately appearance of the *Prince Royal* altered till our ship resembled a butcher's shambles. Nevertheless, against tremendous odds, we kept up a hot fire, and had the satisfaction of seeing more than one of the towering sides of the Dutchmen crumbled into a shapeless mass of charred and splintered timbers.

With the approach of night both fleets withdrew; but for us there was little rest, as all hands were employed reeving fresh rigging, splicing spars, and plugging shot holes, while our dead were committed to the deep, and the wounded transhipped to one of the smaller vessels.

As the sun rose we descried the enemy lying a mile from us. Without hesitation both sides made ready to renew the sanguinary combat. The wind was now much lighter, and in consequence our ships triced up our lower-deck ports and ran out their formidable array of guns--a sight that gave us additional courage,--and the result was not lost upon the Dutch.

In spite of their number we stuck closely to them, the flagship of Van Tromp, who fought in a manner worthy of our former foeman, his redoubtable sire, being singled out as a prize worth taking. Three vessels engaged his ship, and were within an ace of making him haul down his flag, when de Ruyter threw seven of his largest vessels between Van Tromp and our shattered ships. Then through the smoke we perceived that sixteen ships had reinforced the already superior number

of the Dutchmen, and, to save ourselves from total destruction, Albemarle hoisted a signal for the English to retreat slowly towards the mouth of the Thames.

Smarting under the disgrace, we obeyed, firing as we went. Scarce thirty English ships remained out of the fifty-four that commenced the fight. Keeping close together, and yawing from time to time in order to deliver a broadside at our pursuers, we held doggedly on our course, till at length a flat calm set in, and both fleets lay inactive at a mile apart, in which situation darkness again overtook us.

Through sheer exhaustion our men were unable to execute even the smallest, necessary repairs, and throughout the short summer's night they slept heavily at their posts.

As daylight dawned upon the third day of the fight we continued our retreat, and as a faint southerly wind sprang up the enemy drew near with the intention of renewing the fight, concentrating their efforts on Albemarle's ship, which, covering the retreat, presented an undaunted spectacle to our relentless foes.

The *Prince Royal* was next in line ahead, and so close were we that one of Albemarle's officers hailed us to the effect that the admiral had expressed his intention of firing the magazines should things come to the worst.

Shortly after midday a loud shout rose from the Dutch ships, and their rigging was alive with men gazing southward and frantically waving their arms.

"Send a man aloft there," ordered Sir George Ascue, his face crimson with excitement, "and see what those beggars are clamouring over."

The command was obeyed with alacrity, and several of our vessels also sent a seaman to the masthead on a similar errand.

"Sail, ho!" sang out the lookout. "There's a fleet hull down to the south'ard."

"Heaven grant 'tis Rupert's squadron!" ejaculated our captain; "though methinks by their noise those scurvy Dutchmen are sure 'tis de Beaufort."

A few hours would decide whether the English ships would be hopelessly trapped betwixt the two fleets, or whether Prince Rupert's vessels would arrive to turn a retreat into a decisive victory.

The suspense was far more trying than the heat of the engagement had been, but about six o'clock Albemarle hoisted a signal that decided the matter. It was: "Fleet turn four points to the south'ard to effect junction with Prince Rupert."

Eagerly was the manoeuvre executed, and our shattered fleet bore up to meet our welcome reinforcements; but at this juncture an accident occurred that, as far as we were concerned, threw us into the direst misfortune.

The *Prince Royal*, on the new course, was the leemost vessel, and to bring her more into line the master sailed her more off the wind than the rest.

Suddenly a heavy thud shook us from stem to stern, and our damaged

mizzen mast went by the board. Shouts and execrations arose, and all was confusion; we were hard and fast aground on the Galloper Sands, while we had the mortification of seeing the rest of the fleet stand off and leave us to our fate.

With the falling tide the *Prince Royal* listed heavily to starboard, so that her guns were for the most part unworkable, and her great sides were exposed an easy target for the enemy.

Above the din we heard Sir George's voice ordering the men to fall into their stations quietly and orderly. "We're safe enough for the present, my lads," he exclaimed, "for the rascally Dutchmen cannot approach us save in their pinnaces. These we can easily drive off. At this range, too, their fire will be ineffective. They themselves will be too busy with our ships, and with the next tide we'll float easily enough."

His example animated the men, who immediately began to load their muskets and serve out boarding pikes and broadswords, while the master took steps to lay out a couple of anchors in readiness to warp the ship into deep water directly the floodtide should release her.

Meanwhile our consorts were miles away, though probably the desired junction had been made, and we expected to see their topsails fill as they turned to renew the combat. But our attention was drawn by the near approach of the Hollanders. Four large vessels hove to at a quarter of a mile to windward of us and opened a furious fire. Their shots punished us terribly, though, as if hoping to take possession of us, they spared us betwixt wind and water, and directed their fire on our upper works and spars. An hour we lay thus, receiving their combined storm of shot, yet unable to reply. Splinters flew, ropes, blocks, and spars came tumbling down from aloft, men fell dead or wounded, and shrieks and groans rent the air, while all we could do was to shake our fists in useless rage at our unapproachable foes.

Presently we saw boatloads of armed men leaving the Dutch ships, and we realized that an attempt was to be made to carry us by boarding. This spurred us to action, and directly the boats came within musket range a hot fire was opened on them, though in this act many of our men, exposing themselves recklessly, were shot down by the fire from the guns of the ships.

Several of the boats were sunk by a well-directed fire from our swivel guns, but eight or nine gained the side of the *Prince Royal*, and, passing under the comparative shelter afforded by our lofty stern, boarded us on the starboard side, where, owing to the list, our bulwarks were much lower than on the other side.

They clambered up our sides with the greatest intrepidity, but were met with equal resolution and courage. More boats were sunk alongside by dropping heavy shot into them, those of their crew who wore breastplates perishing miserably in the sea. Evidently the Dutchmen thought our losses under fire had been greater

than they actually were; but they soon realized their mistake, and with thrust of pike, swordthrusts, musket and pistol shots, they were swept aside as fast as their heads appeared above the bulwarks.

[image]

"THEY CLAMBERED UP OUR SIDES WITH THE GREATEST INTREPIDITY"

Only one of the enemy reached our deck, and he was dragged on board by the clever cast of a running bowline thrown by a seaman, who, seizing his captive in his powerful grasp, demanded and obtained his surrender at the point of a gleaming knife, while his comrades roared with laughter at the hapless Dutchman's discomfiture.

The attempt to board us failed dismally, only four boats, filled with more or less wounded men, getting clear from our sides, their retreat being hailed with shouts of derision from our exultant seamen.

But our joy was turned to feelings of dismay when we perceived that two small ships had joined the Dutch men-of-war, and that they were brought to with reduced canvas immediately to windward of us, and were held by stern moorings only, so that their bows were pointed straight at our luckless vessel. Most of us knew too much of the art of war to need to have these new tactics explained: we were to be attacked by fire ships!

In our helpless position we were doomed. Not a boat did we carry that was in a condition to float, otherwise volunteers would not have been lacking who would have risked their lives in an attempt to tow these furnaces clear of us. The officers held a consultation--Sir George Ascue was not one of them; whether he was killed or wounded I did not at that time know--and the opinion of the council was that if we were grappled by the fire ships our fate would no doubt be a glorious one, but of little use to His Majesty the King. On the other hand, if we surrendered, there was a possibility of being recaptured by our consorts, and thus our services would be still at His Majesty's command.

The latter alternative was accepted, and, amidst the furious and indignant shouts of the seamen, the Cross of St. George was struck, and a white flag fluttered from our mainmast truck.

The Dutchmen immediately sent boats to take possession of the unfortunate *Prince Royal*, but ere the first boat came alongside, most of the crew had secured their personal belongings. I, for my part, went below and placed all the money I had in a leather pouch, which I strapped to my waist with a belt underneath my clothing--though it is reported the Hollanders always respect personal property.

Then I came on deck and joined my comrades, who stood in a disconsolate group awaiting the arrival of our captors.

We were curtly ordered over the side, and hurriedly the whole of the crew were transferred to the various Dutch ships. The officers were taken on board the admiral's, where de Ruyter himself accepted our surrender, complimenting us on our gallant defence, and permitting the senior officers to retain their swords.

This done, we were sent on board a frigate and placed in a dark, stuffy hole below the waterline. Faintly we could hear the dull booming of the guns, which told us that the fleets were re-engaged, but gradually the sound died away.

Greville Drake had a pocket compass, which showed us that the vessel was heading eastward. Our captors had taken good care that we should not fall into the hands of our friends: we were on our way to Holland and captivity.

How the engagement would end we knew not, but our spirits were greatly depressed with our misfortunes, and one and all, having seen that the courage and fortitude of our enemies had been unduly depreciated by our leaders, were far from sanguine as to the prospects of a victory of our hitherto redoubtable fleet.

Our reveries were cut short by the appearance of a stolid Dutchman, who brought us a liberal supply of food that, compared with our hard fare of the last month, was a bounteous feast. We plied him with eager questions, but his only reply was an expressionless shake of his massive head, and for the time being vague surmises had to suffice.

At length, worn out with bodily fatigue, we threw ourselves down on our rough and hard pallets, and slept soundly till we were awakened by the unmistakable sounds that accompany the action of a ship taking in sail.

We had arrived in the land of our captivity.

CHAPTER XVI--I Meet an Old Enemy

Directly our prison ship was moored alongside a quay we were summoned on deck, where an escort of soldiers was in waiting to convey us to a place of confinement on shore.

Some of our officers immediately recognized the port as Rotterdam, which to me appeared a city of lofty buildings beset with canals and waterways.

It was soon evident that we were to be separated, and seeing this to be the case I kept close to Drake and another young lieutenant, Hubert Felgate by name, who had been slightly wounded in the right arm during the first day's engagement. He was of a somewhat taciturn disposition, though, when properly understood, he was a good-hearted and reliable friend.

To our great satisfaction the three of us were taken to a magistrate's office. As none of us could speak their language, a Dutchman was called in to act as interpreter, but so quaint was his attempt at speaking English that it was with the greatest difficulty that we could understand what was required of us.

At length we discovered that if we gave our parole we should be allowed comparative freedom within the city; if not, well--a meaning shrug of the shoulders completed the unspoken sentence.

We were permitted to reason the proposition out among ourselves, which we did in an undertone. Young and hot-headed, the idea of a possible exchange of prisoners never entered our heads, but on the other hand the excitement of an attempt at escape held out an inducement to refuse our parole. We quickly decided on the latter course. The magistrate closed a book in front of him in a manner that denoted a feeling of disappointment, then, signing to our guards, he motioned us to be removed.

We were conducted along a stone passage and down a spiral staircase, the weapons of our guards clanking dismally as they struck the stone steps. At the bottom of the staircase we proceeded along another passage, which was lighted by a few feeble lamps, while water trickled through the roof in such a manner as to suggest that we were passing under some canal. At the end an iron door barred the way. This the sergeant of the guard unlocked and threw open, disclosing a large room with a vaulted stone roof, lighted only by two small grated windows some twelve feet from the ground. The atmosphere was rank, while moisture was everywhere--on the walls, floor, and even on the top of a massive oak table, the polish of which was cut and scraped till it resembled a butcher's block.

As our eyes grew accustomed to the dim light we perceived that the room was a torture chamber. In one corner stood a ponderous rack, its rollers still glistening with a coating of oil. Other instruments of torture were placed round the walls in an orderly manner, showing by their brightness that they were still kept in use.

I must confess the sight turned us, though we had never yet had accounts of prisoners of war being put to the torture. We were not left long in suspense, for the soldiers, having carefully searched us (though they left us our money), went out and locked and barred the door.

Left to ourselves, we began to discuss our situation. Escape from this horrible hole was out of the question, but we began a tour of the room to ascertain our bearings.

"I almost wish that we had given the burgomaster our parole," remarked Felgate dolefully. "To eke out an existence for a few months, or even weeks or days, in this den would almost drive one to madness."

"What do they mean by putting us in here?" asked Drake. "Surely they don't mean to put us to the torture as if we were political prisoners?"

"I don't think that," I remarked, "otherwise those rascals would have relieved us of our money."

"Well, they took my knife," grumbled Felgate. "Ah! What fools these Dutchmen are! Look! Why should we not take some small articles that might aid our escape?"

He pointed to the walls, where hung several small knives. We immediately secured one each, and in addition concealed a few iron spikes under our clothing, chuckling to ourselves at the folly of our captors in searching us before we were left alone amid so terrible yet useful an array of instruments.

Then, having completed our inspection, we seated ourselves on the framework of the rack, relapsing into a silence that was broken only by the occasional scamper of a swarm of rats across the floor, and the rippling of a stream of water outside the thick stone walls of our prison.

The solitude was unbearable, though we never stopped to consider what it would have been like had we been placed in separate rooms. At length Felgate stood up, and, seizing a hammer that was used apparently to drive the wedges into the boot, he strode across to the door and began to thunder a rain of blows upon it. Then he waited, but for all the good it did he might well have saved himself the trouble. No one came to see who was the cause of the clamour, and silence again reigned supreme.

The hours rolled slowly by, and just as the daylight that filtered through the narrow windows began to fade, our prison door was thrown open and the guards reappeared. Hardly able to repress a smile that flitted across his grim features, the sergeant deliberately walked up to Felgate, relieved him of the knife and two spikes that he had concealed, and replaced them. Greville and I were served in the same manner, our crestfallen faces plainly showing our dismay. We had been watched through some secret spy-hole during the whole time we were left, as we had imagined, alone.

Once more we were taken into the presence of the magistrate, who, phlegmatic as ever, merely raised one eyebrow slightly and tapped the book in front of him with the feathered end of his pen.

The gesture was impressive with its silent enquiry, but with the obstinacy of

our race we again refused to give any pledge that would debar us from making any attempt at escape. A sign, and we were hurried from the burgomaster's presence, and, with a file of pikemen surrounding us, we were taken, not to that loathsome dungeon, but into the open air.

Through crowds of silent spectators we were marched, along a broad street planted with tall trees, the light of the buildings on the far side being reflected in the placid waters of a canal. Then we crossed a drawbridge, and a hundred yards farther our guards halted outside a building the entrance to which was gained by a double flight of broad stone steps.

A challenge and a password were exchanged, and we were handed over to another armed guard, who escorted us to a small room, which, though roughly furnished, was a surprisingly comfortable prison. Some bundles of straw were thrown on the floor, a plain though ample meal was provided, and we were left to ourselves once more.

It was now late, but for several hours we tossed uneasily on our straw couches, till, worn out with the excitement and fatigue, we fell asleep, to be awakened only too soon by the entry of our jailers.

By signs they informed us that we were to start on a long journey, and providing us with blankets and klompen, or wooden shoes similar to the sabots of the French, they left us to enjoy another meal of porridge, rusk bread, and cheese.

An hour later they returned, and rolling our blankets they fastened them bandolier fashion across one shoulder and under the other. Our shoes, though admirable for wear on board ship, were useless on a rough road, so these were slung round our necks and the klompen were placed upon our feet. Our captors were of a mind to treat us kindly, but I must admit that walking in these clumsy wooden shoes occasioned us no little discomfort.

Where our destination was we could not discover. Our guards would not, or could not, understand the enquiries we made in dumb-show, but when clear of the city our route lay to the north.

For miles we marched between the files of our escort of pikemen, and we had ample opportunities of studying the nature of the land, which in no small measure well deserves the name of the Low Countries. The road was bordered with an avenue of trees that served to break the monotony that the broad expanse of flat country affords. There were scores of windmills all busily engaged, not in grinding wheat, but in pumping water from the drains and throwing it over the dykes.

These dykes, which were cut by the Hollanders to such good purpose during their desperate resistance against the might of Spain, were massive embankments planted with sedge and reeds, and faced in places with straw so as to resist the sea better. As we progressed we saw nothing of the ocean, though it was said that

the place where we were walking was well below the sea level.

We passed through numerous villages, the inhabitants of which flocked out to see us, though they behaved courteously, and refrained from insulting us, a contrast to the behaviour of our own countrymen to their Dutch prisoners.

After marching for over two hours we arrived at a town called Delft, where the curiosity caused by our progress was somewhat alienated by a sight that greatly astonished us. A crowd of townspeople was approaching us, and in the centre walked a portly *vrouw*, wearing a weighty vessel not unlike a butter churn, her head appearing through a hole, the rest of her being hidden inside the wooden barrel. Her miserable plight made her the butt of the crowd. But for what reason she was undergoing this punishment we could not discover, though I doubt not that she was a scold, such as we in England place in the ducking stool.

We halted for an hour at Delft, the pikemen refreshing themselves by taking enormous quantities of ale, while we were fain to be content with a loaf of bread, cheese, and a pitcher of water. A woman, taking compassion on us, however, sent a little girl to us with a jug brimming with fresh milk.

We talked freely, none of the soldiers apparently understanding our conversation, and discussed the possibility of making our escape.

"Could we but once slip between the men, I think we should be swift-footed enough to shake them off," remarked Felgate. "What with their breastplates and headpieces their running would be like to that of Goliath of Gath."

"True!" replied Drake. "But with these wretched wooden shoes----" and he pointed meaningly at his feet.

"We can make out that they gall our heels, and take them off for a while; then at the favourable moment--you, Drake, can give the word--we'll make a dash for freedom."

"And after----?" I enquired.

"That remains to be seen," rejoined Felgate.

While we conversed I could not help noticing that the sergeant eyed us sharply more than once; and whether it was merely fancy or not, I could not help thinking that I had seen him before. But as very few Dutchmen had made my acquaintance (and these only as enemies) I dismissed the idea from my mind.

The man was short, thick-set, with a heavy beard that concealed most of his features, but the look in his eyes betokened that he was no infant in the art of war, and could, if occasion served, prove a harsh taskmaster.

At length the order was given to proceed. At a mile from Delft, Felgate began to limp. His example was quickly followed by Drake, and shortly after I adopted the same ruse, though in reality I had good cause to do so, the unaccustomed nature of my footgear beginning to have an ill effect.

Soon Drake stopped, pointed to his shoes, and made signs that he could not

walk farther. The pikemen came to a halt and looked at us sympathetically, while the sergeant talked volubly. We seized the opportunity of pulling off the klompen and replacing our own shoes, and the march was resumed.

The country was perfectly flat, as hitherto, but the dykes were at a greater distance from the road. Though they shut in our range of vision we knew that dry land lay beyond, as we could discern several windmills, roofs of houses, and trees on the other side.

The pikemen struggled on, apparently fatigued by the heat of the day. Drake touched my arm and whispered: "Be ready!" I was all alertness, waiting for the signal to break away.

Suddenly Felgate staggered, as if seized with faintness, and fell on his hands and knees. The soldier immediately behind, unable to check himself, fell over him; then, with a loud cry of "Now!" Felgate jumped to his feet, and, followed by us, rushed off towards the nearest dyke.

Our guards, to our surprise, did not attempt to follow us; instead, they stood looking at us, till, at a command from the sergeant, they spread out, some remaining still, the rest marching slowly in both directions along the road.

Wondering at this manoeuvre we still ran, looking backwards at intervals. When close to the dyke we saw that the pikemen had extended over a distance of one hundred yards, and were now making their way in a long straggling line straight for the dyke.

We redoubled our efforts, climbed up the soft sandy embankment, and gained the top. Here we found that a broad ditch barred our progress. "On, lads, on!" cried Felgate. "These scurvy pikemen will never dare cross this with the weight of their accoutrements."

Carried away by his words, we dashed down the slope of the dyke, only to find, too late, that a broad belt of liquid mud, thickly interspersed with sedge, lay betwixt us and the water. In a moment we were all struggling up to our waists in the impenetrable ooze.

At length, worn out by our fruitless endeavours to extricate ourselves, we waited motionless in the slime till the grinning faces of the pikemen appeared above the bank. By this time we had sunk nearly to our shoulders; but by the aid of the men's pikes we were hauled on to dry land, amid the coarse jests and laughter of our rescuers.

We were in a truly miserable plight, the mud clinging to our wet garments like pitch, while the stench was abominable. To complete our discomfiture, the sergeant tapped his petronel significantly and exclaimed in perfect English: "Now, sirrahs, you will perceive that escape is no easy matter. Another attempt and I'll warrant ye will not fare half so lightly."

We gazed on him in amazement; then Drake exclaimed: "My man, if thou'rt

not a renegade, then may I not see England again!"

"As you will," rejoined the sergeant, and ordered the men to fall in. Then we regained the highway and resumed our weary way.

It was late in the evening ere we arrived at our destination, which proved to be the town of Haarlem, of which I had heard much with reference to its stubborn defence against the Spaniards. This was to be our prison for many dreary months.

We were placed in separate rooms, though during the day we were permitted to take exercise together. For a long time we hardly dared mention the possibilities of escape, with the thought of our previous attempt fresh in our minds. We frequently discoursed on the probable events that were occurring at home, but our guards refrained from giving us any information on the subject, though one or two of our new custodians spoke a few words of broken English at intervals.

Thus we knew not of the glorious victory of Albemarle over de Ruyter on the 25th of July following our capture; but by the sullen demeanour of the soldiers we guessed that once more the States of Holland were suffering for their audacity in questioning our supremacy on the sea.

Autumn passed, and winter, with intense cold, drew on apace. About this time I made an important discovery, which served to throw a little light on the mystery that enshrouded my existence.

One day the renegade sergeant came into my apartment. He had grown somewhat communicative of late, talking freely of the country in whose service he was, though very reserved in matters pertaining to the land of his birth. The feeling that I had seen him before grew apace, till on this occasion I asked him bluntly why he took service with our enemies.

His reply was a hideous scowl, and like a flash the truth came to my mind--it was Increase Joyce, my father's murderer!

For a moment I could scarce refrain from throwing myself upon him; but reflecting that little would be gained thus, and that much might be obtained by strategy, I refrained, and, shrugging my shoulders indifferently, I turned from him and walked to the farther part of the room.

I saw him no more that day, but on the day following he again entered my apartment or cell--call it which you will. Though feigning to avoid conversation with him, I found that his moody fit had passed, and that he was willing to talk.

Little by little I gathered his history, which, though mostly lies, gave me an insight into his movements and plans.

He had, he said, fled the country at the Restoration for political reasons, a price having been set upon his head. (I smiled grimly at this, knowing only too well why his head was thus valued.) He had served as a soldier of fortune on the Rhine and in the Low Countries, finally joining the army of the States of Holland and rising to his present rank; though, in justice to the Dutch be it said, he was

never allowed to take up arms against his own countrymen.

I had heard enough for once, and for the time being I resolved not to mention the matter either to Drake or to Felgate.

Of what was taking place betwixt England and Holland we learned little. Occasionally we had a visit from the governor of the fortress, a Major Van der Wycke, a courteous and honest soldier, who carefully refrained from hurting our susceptibilities with reference to the war, though he told us of the great fire that practically destroyed the best part of London. This we were told on Christmas Day, over three months after its occurrence.

Very slowly the days passed. Winter gave place to spring, yet no sign of our being released was given us, neither did any loophole of escape present itself. One day Joyce came into my room with the news that he was leaving the service of the States of Holland, and had a good offer for his sword from the King of France. He seemed very elated, and now was the time to obtain what information I could.

"Thou art a Yorkshireman, perchance?" I enquired offhandedly, interrupting him in the midst of a rambling statement.

"I a Yorkshireman? Never, young sir!"

"Then from Lincolnshire, doubtless?"

"Nor from Lincolnshire. Why didst think so?"

"From thy manner of speech, Sergeant," I replied, forcing a laugh. "It savours much of the north."

"I have travelled much, and know both those counties well."

"Then perchance Midgley is known to you, Sergeant?"

"I cannot recall the name. Where is it?"

"It is my native village," I asserted, with a slight deviation from the truth. "It lies betwixt Pontefract and Holwick."

At the mention of Holwick he started, yet, retaining command over his feelings, he remarked: "I know it not. But, beshrew me! the name of Holwick reminds me---- Dost know Holwick well?"

"Passably," I replied offhandedly. "There is a market cross, a church, a score or so of stone houses, a castle more or less in ruin, and a----"

"A castle, sayest thou?" he interrupted excitedly. "And who lives there?"

"I cannot say."

"Ah! Now, concerning this castle," he remarked, tapping his clay pipe on his heel with such vehemence that the stem broke in three places, "I have heard that a goodly store of treasure lies hidden there. In fact, an old comrade of mine, who lay stricken to death on the field of Marston Moor, did bestow upon me a paper whereby the treasure should be mine. But either he was befooling himself or me, for I could find nothing."

Here was a piece of good fortune.

"Where did you look?" I enquired disinterestedly.

"Where did I look? Now, out on me for a dolt! I delved every night for more than a fortnight, till the countryside rang with tales of the ghost of Holwick, and none would venture near o' nights, and hardly by day."

"Were the directions fully adhered to?"

He looked fixedly at me for a moment, as if suspecting my thoughts, then from his pocket he produced the identical metal box that he had filched from my father's corse. Again I could hardly refrain from springing upon him; but discretion is ever the better part of valour.

From the box he drew a folded paper, yellow with age, and discoloured and torn with frequent usage.

"Mark you, what a jargon! 'Without ye two tall of ye thirty-two paces right dig Holwick may the treasure give full out mine whereas my----' Did ever a man have such a frail clue?"

"Then what did you do?"

"Do? I dug thirty-two paces from the castle walls on all sides save the west, for at that distance there was naught but a muddy stream. It might be thirty-two paces from the church, the cross, or what not. But I have a mind to make one more attempt ere I go to France. If that fails, then my right I'll sell to the first Jew that makes me an offer."

"Let me see if I can make aught of it," I said, carelessly stretching out my hand. To my delight Joyce handed it to me, and I saw the writing I knew so well.

For over an hour we talked, I, for my part, throwing out idle suggestions and listening to Joyce's explanations, trying at the same time to commit the apparently senseless words to memory.

Suddenly the door was flung open and the governor appeared. With a motion of his hand he signed for Joyce to withdraw, and the villain went out, leaving the precious document in my hands. Major Van der Wycke used to do the rounds in a somewhat erratic fashion, and for this once I thanked his eccentricity. When he went he desired the sergeant to accompany him, and for the time being I was at liberty to copy the mysterious message.

I had not quill nor crayon nor paper. I had read of men writing with their blood, but this method appeared very unsatisfactory. At length I bethought me of the fire, and taking a piece of charcoal I scrawled the words on the under side of my table. This I did, promising myself to ask for pens and paper at the first opportunity, and barely had I finished my task when the renegade reappeared.

"Where's that paper?" asked he. "I'll venture that your wits are no sharper than mine."

I handed it back to him with the remark that it conveyed nothing, and wished him all the luck he deserved. This double-barrelled compliment he took

as favourable to himself, and after a short further conversation he left.

That night Joyce quitted Haarlem, and I was not fated to see him again for some time.

CHAPTER XVII--Showing that there are Two Means of Leaving a Prison

With the lengthening days our hopes of effecting an escape increased. The vigilance of our guards had somewhat relaxed, and we were allowed to remain in one another's company for a much longer period.

Felgate and Greville discussed innumerable plans with me, but in every case a serious obstacle arose that necessitated the abandonment of that particular scheme, till one day the long-hoped-for opportunity arrived.

In the middle of the month of June--I had just celebrated my twentieth birthday in a very despondent style--Van der Wycke came to us one morning with a beaming face that showed that something very unusual had occurred to upset the stolidity of this typical Dutchman.

"Ah, Mynheer Drake," he said in his very broken English, "I must tell you ze goot news for us, but bad news for you. Our ships have broken all ze Englischman, Chatham is burnt, and ve vill even now take London." And in this style he told us the heartbreaking news of the never-to-be-forgotten disgrace at Chatham, of the burning or sinking of the *Royal Oak*, the *James*, the *London*, and several other smaller vessels. He also said that His Majesty and the Court and Parliament had removed to Bristol, though this latter information afterwards proved to be false.

For days we remained too sick at heart to attempt an escape; but early in the month of July we were informed that our prison was to be limewashed, and that for a few days at least we were to be kept in one room at the farther side of the building.

I had long before this secured a careful copy of the paper that Increase Joyce had shown me, and this I kept concealed on my person, so that in any case I should still retain what might subsequently prove a valuable piece of information.

Our new quarters overlooked the town walls, and, the windows being lower and larger than those of our former prison, we could easily observe what was going on.

The Hollanders were evidently making preparations to celebrate their victory, for garlands and decorated masts were being displayed. This served to increase our bitterness at heart, and, curiously enough, our guards became particularly lax in their duties. In fact, but for the purpose of supplying us with food, we were practically ignored.

We soon discovered that the bars of one of the windows could easily be wrenched from their fastenings, and with these removed only a ten-foot drop lay between us and freedom.

Carefully setting apart a portion of our rations, we soon secured enough food to last us for a couple of days, and one evening, directly the guards had visited us for the last time that night, Greville climbed on Felgate's shoulders and attacked the crumbling mortar that kept the bars in position.

In less than an hour we succeeded, by dint of plenty of hard work, in removing the bars, and all was ready for our flight.

The night was dark, the stars being constantly hidden by dense masses of drifting clouds, while the wind howled mournfully amid the trees that lined the roadway within the ramparts.

The steady tramp of a sentry showed the necessity of extreme caution, and the clocks chimed ten ere the man was visited by the rounds. Half an hour later he left his post and disappeared--in all probability to enjoy a quiet sleep.

"Now is our time," whispered Drake, and squeezing his body through the aperture he dropped lightly upon the pavement. His example was quickly and cautiously followed, and in less time than we expected we were creeping along in the darkest shadows towards the open country.

Instinct took us towards the sea, from which blew a stinging, salt-laden breeze that caused a sensation of freedom, and when at length we gained the summit of the last rush-grown dyke, we could see the waves lashing the beach in so violent a manner as to make an attempt to escape by boat an absolute impossibility.

However, the hours of darkness were fleeting fast, so we pressed on along the shore, peering through the darkness to try and secure a safe shelter. Soon we came upon a small hamlet, of which every house was in darkness, though the occasional barking of dogs warned us that the place was to be avoided. A short distance beyond was a small haven, wherein we could see several boats of all sizes

riding easily at anchor.

The wind had now veered more to the north-'ard, and with it a heavy rain came on. This decided us, and, trusting that the downpour would deaden the force of the wind, we launched a small boat and pulled off to a galliot of about twenty tons burthen.

We approached her cautiously, for fear that she might have someone sleeping on board. On coming alongside we fended off our frail cockle shell, while Felgate climbed softly up her sides and gained the deck. She was open amidships, but had a cuddy for'ard and a small cabin under her poop.

Felgate made his way aft, and we saw him disappear under the shadow of the poop. A moment later and he reappeared, glided across the deck, and explored the cuddy. Everything appeared satisfactory, so we joined him, sending the dinghy adrift.

The galliot carried two masts, the after one only being set up. The foremast was housed in a tabernacle and lay on the deck. We manned a windlass, and with a dismal creaking, that alarmed us mightily, the mast slowly rose to an upright position. Then it was an easy matter to spread the great tanned sail, and having slipped the cable we stood westwards towards England and freedom.

Once clear of the haven we felt the lift of the ocean as the vessel heeled to the breeze. Drake and I stood by the tiller, while Felgate went for'ard to keep a bright lookout.

There was no longer need for silence, and our tongues wagged merrily at the thought of our escape. The galliot was, like all Dutch craft, of great beam, with bluff bows and an ugly square stern. She would, we had little doubt, prove a good sea boat, but sluggish in a light wind. As it was, the steady breeze was just strong enough to make her lively, and it was with satisfaction that we saw the dim outline of the low-lying coast get fainter and fainter.

Suddenly a massive post, crowned by a triangle, loomed out on our starboard bow.

"Steady there!" shouted Felgate; "there's a beacon ahead."

"Which side shall we make for?" asked Greville.

"Quick, Aubrey, try a cast!" said Felgate, and I picked up a heavy piece of metal which happened to be lying near, fastened a line to it, and threw it overboard. Less than three fathoms! Again I tried, and touched the bottom in little more than two.

"'Bout ship!" shouted Drake, bearing down on the long tiller, and the galliot, her sails flapping in the wind like the wings of a wounded bird, came about slowly yet surely, the breeze filled her sails as she lay on the other tack, and once more she slipped into deep water.

But the result of this manoeuvre was bewildering. The blackness that pre-

cedes the dawn is always greatest; the shore was invisible, and our sole guide as to direction was the wind, which we hoped still blew from the same quarter. All around were the short, steep, white-crested waves that are so typical of the shallow waters around the Dutch coasts, while our range of vision on all sides was limited to a space of about a hundred yards of heaving water.

"Keep the lead going!" ordered Greville, and feverishly I made cast after cast with my rough-and-ready leadline.

For some time I found no bottom with four fathoms, which was the available length of the line, and I was on the point of giving up the task with a feeling that we were clear of the shallows, when I felt the sinker touch bottom.

The boat was once more put about and the lead kept going, but still the depth remained the same, or, rather, slightly shoaling. Again we tacked, but our efforts to find deeper water were unavailing, and at last the galliot ran aground with a slight shock on a bed of soft sand.

With a falling tide our position was hopeless, and when daylight dawned and objects became visible, we found to our dismay that we were within half a mile of the shore, and in full view of the hamlet from which we had taken the galliot. As we had been sailing for over two hours, we must have doubled backwards and forwards for want of keeping a proper course, our numerous tacks having completely bewildered us.

The inhabitants of the town of Haarlem were abroad early, and it was evident that our ignominious situation had come to their knowledge, for crowds lined the shore looking steadfastly in our direction.

At about six in the morning the tide had left us high and dry, and the boundless expanse of sandbanks showed us how hopeless was our task on a dark night. Thoroughly disheartened and ashamed, we withdrew to the cabin, where we awaited the arrival of the soldiers who were to take us back to captivity.

"Ah, goot-morning, Mynheer!" was the greeting of the governor, as he made his way across the sloping deck of the galliot, his usually grave visage puckered with a thousand wrinkles, while his eyes twinkled with grim humour.

"Take us and do whatever you will," replied Felgate savagely, "but for any sake taunt us not!"

Van der Wycke bowed in well-feigned gravity.

"Pardon, Mynheer," he replied, "but you yourselves haf put to much trouble for nothing. You are now free!"

And to our astonishment we learned how that peace had been proclaimed at Breda on the previous day, and that our futile attempt might well not have taken place.

Needless to say, our further stay in the Low Countries was hurried as quickly as possible, and next day a stout little brig conveyed us from Rotterdam

to London. The joys of seeing our native land once more were somewhat damped by the pitiful sight of the blackened hulls of our men-of-war that had been sunk off the mouth of the Thames.

CHAPTER XVIII--The Veil is Partly Drawn

Directly I set foot once more on English soil I hastened to Portsmouth, though on my journey thither I did stay a while at Rake, for the sake of old memories. On my arrival at Portsmouth I found my uncle looking careworn and haggard, due to the constant strain and worry that his duties in the dockyard entailed, for discontent amongst the workmen had almost grown into open mutiny. So ill paid were they that in some cases families were starving while work was plentiful.

As the 23rd day of April, 1668, drew near, that being my twenty-first birthday, I found that I was becoming more and more excited over the vague rumours that I had heard from time to time respecting the remarkable disclosures that were to be made under the terms of my father's will.

Nor was the excitement confined to myself. My uncle busied himself till all traces of his worry lost themselves in his activity; my aunt bustled about the house, driving the servants hither and thither, bringing linen from the huge oak chest, furbishing the massive furniture, and causing a huge supply of viands to be prepared for the entertainment of our guests--for the invited company numbered close on a score, so that our house would be filled to overflowing, and rooms had to be engaged at "The Bell Inn" and "The Blue Posts".

On the Monday preceding the eventful day the guests began to arrive. There were Sir George Lee, greyer and more bent than of yore, Master Hugh Salesbury, Lawyer Whitehead, all from the neighbourhood of Rake; my old shipmates, Greville Drake and Felgate, the latter accompanied by his young wife, whom he had lately wedded, and several others who had been friends of my father long before I could remember.

My birthday eve they kept in high style, the men smoking long clay pipes, till our dining-room was enveloped in a cloud of tobacco smoke, so that my aunt

declared that her best hangings would reek for days like a London coffee tavern, whereat Sir George pacified her by saying that the weed of Virginia is ever a sovereign safeguard against the plague!

My twenty-first birthday came at last, and at ten in the morning we all assembled in our largest room, where, after I had received the congratulations of my friends, the long-expected legal formality began.

I sat at the head of the long oak table, with Lawyer Whitehead on my right and Sir George on my left, the others being seated at the sides. Before the lawyer was placed a heavy brass-bound box, which, besides being locked, was fastened with a formidable-looking red seal.

With a solemn bow Master Whitehead stood up, and, clearing his throat with a professional cough, began in a dry, legal manner:

"In accordance with the instruction laid down by my late client, Master Owen Wentworth, I have to make the announcement that his son, who this day attains his majority, can now take upon himself his rightful title, Sir Aubrey Wentworth of Holwick, in the county of Yorks."

At this astounding information my senses became numb, and I could but dimly see the faces of my friends and hear the indistinct murmur of astonishment and congratulation from those of my guests who up to the present were not in the secret.

"The late Owen Wentworth, by reason of his excessive loyalty to His Majesty the King, and of his careful thought for the proper upbringing of his son during the past troublous times, did part with a portion of his family estates and personal property in order to furnish His Majesty with such aid as all loyal cavaliers were bound by their duty to give. The residue, which is no inconsiderable amount, he hid in a secure place, taking good care that it should come to his son on his attaining the age of twenty-one, provided that he showed great promise of filling his position in a right and proper manner. The recovery of the hidden treasure will depend on certain conditions imposed by Sir Owen (to give him his rightful title), and these conditions were written and entrusted to my keeping." Here the lawyer tapped the box with his finger and proceeded to break the seal. This done, he produced a small key and unlocked the box. The hinges creaked as he threw back the lid and disclosed a number of parchments all neatly tied with faded ribbon.

Placing the documents on the table, the lawyer continued. "I have here," he said, "a third part of a sheet of writing, which, when united to its fellows, will disclose the exact position of the hidden riches of Holwick. Another portion worthy Sir George hath, while you, Sir Aubrey, must in truth produce the third part."

At this the knight laid down a paper which I recognized as the one that had

been read by him under such strange circumstances at Rake, some eight years before, and the light flashed across me--the senseless jargon that he had read was part of a secret code whereby I should inherit my fortune.

"Now, Sir Aubrey, where is your share of the document?"

I stammered that I had not such a paper.

"Then----"

"Stay one moment, Master Whitehead," said Sir George; "if I remember aught, Sir Aubrey never had his part of the document delivered to him. His father expressly stated that a metal box was to be given to him, and under pains and penalties he was not to open it to this day. But, as we know, that box was filched, and therefore Sir Aubrey could not possibly have opened it, neither can he be held accountable for its contents."

"True, true! Sir George," replied Master Whitehead; "but unfortunately, though Sir Aubrey is not to be held accountable, the fact remains that the complete solution is missing, and, as my late client refused to make a duplicate, the secret is as far off as ever."

Here I could not forbear from interrupting the argument betwixt the knight and the lawyer.

"But I have a copy of the part that should have been entrusted to me!"

"Heaven bless the boy!" ejaculated Sir George. "Where is it, and how came you by it?"

In answer I rushed off to my own room, laid hold of the precious copy, and returned.

"Here it is!" I shouted triumphantly, handing it to Master Whitehead, and straightway I told them of my meeting with Increase Joyce, and how I secured the temporary possession of the filched document.

"Now for the test," remarked Sir George when I had finished my tale, and straightway the three papers were placed side by side on the table, everyone crowding round to read what the joint document would reveal.

The paper which I produced did not correspond with the others, and the lawyer twisted and turned them about for some considerable time. At length a puckered frown overspread his wizened face, and he beat upon the table with his fingers with the air of a man who has sustained a momentary check.

"'To Beverley without ye gate on ye highway----' that reads aright; but the next line doth not seem in keeping with the rest. How now, Sir George, if thy wits are as sharp as thy sword----"

But Sir George Lee shook his head. "Troth!" he ejaculated, "if a man of law cannot frame the wording of a document, how can I, a country gentleman, hope to do it?"

"Methinks I can help you," spoke a soft, sweet voice, and looking up I saw

Mistress Felgate, who, hand in hand with her husband, had been a silent yet interested listener to the discussion.

The lawyer rose, and with great courtesy placed his hand over his heart and bowed, yet his manner betokened a professional scorn for feminine advice.

"At your service, madam."

"Then begin with the bottommost line and read upwards."

"'Whereas my sonne having trulie carried out mine desires----'"

"Faith, sweetest, thy wits have proved better than the lawyer's!" interrupted Felgate, bringing his fist down heavily on the table in his excitement.

"'----Mine desires'" resumed Master Whitehead, receiving the interruption with a deprecatory cough, "'I doe hereby give full directions in soe that the treasures of mine house at Holwick may come to him by right. Digge IIJ feet down at XXXII paces from y^e west side of y^e wall, keeping in line II tall fir trees that doe lie without y^e gate on y^e highway to Beverley.'"

"Nothing particularly difficult about these instructions," remarked my uncle.

"I think so too," I replied; "and even now that villain Joyce may be making a second and possibly successful attempt to recover what is mine by rights. Indeed, from what he told me, he must have been very near the spot."

"There is little time to be lost," replied Sir George. "My advice to you is that you travel hotfoot to Holwick, and leave nothing undone till you lay hands on the treasure. Would I were a score or so of years younger and I would bear you company with the greatest of pleasure."

"I'll start to-morrow!" I exclaimed resolutely.

"I am with you, Aubrey," said Drake, grasping my hand.

"And I cannot desert my old shipmates," added Felgate. "So I hoist the signal for permission to part company; and if my senior officer will comply, I'll weigh anchor with you to-morrow."

Mistress Felgate gave her permission with the stipulation that her husband must run no needless risks, the compact was sealed by a kiss bestowed by her gallant and unabashed bridegroom, and the conversation was resumed, while mirth and gaiety reigned supreme.

My mind, however, was too full of feverish anxiety for me to enjoy the festivities, and drawing Greville aside, I discussed our forthcoming journey.

"And if you find that Joyce has forestalled you?" he asked.

"Then I'll track him to the utmost end of the earth."

"And then----?"

"Greville, you know that I am not a revengeful man by nature, but I swear that that villain dies by my hand."

"Then why didn't you kill him at Haarlem?"

"And get hanged for my pains? No, no! 'Tis a waiting game."

Presently Felgate joined us, and together we slipped out of the house, crossed the street, and entered the establishment that Nicholas Wade ran under the designation of posting stables.

The owner, bald-headed, high-shouldered, and bow-legged like many of his class, came forth and mincingly asked what we required.

"Horses, man, horses! The best you have in your stables.

"For how long, your honour?"

"As long as it serves us. This bay will suit me."

"And I take a fancy to that black mare," added Drake.

"Nay, you've forestalled me," rejoined Felgate laughingly. "But no matter, the brown nag will serve me, for of a verity I feel more at home in a jollyboat than on the back of that beast."

The question of terms was quickly settled, and the mounts were ordered to be brought round at nine the next morning. Then we went back to enjoy the festivities, longing the while for the morrow to come.

CHAPTER XIX--How Three Horsemen set out for the North

Punctually to the minute our steeds were brought round, the farewells were said, and with a loose rein we cantered down the narrow cobble-paved street towards the Landport Gate. The horses' hoofs echoed under the dark gateway and clattered across the drawbridge, the town of Portsmouth was left behind, and the dense cluster of timbered and red-tiled houses gave place to verdant fields and clumps of tall trees that even now were beginning to burst into leaf.

We were each armed with sword and pistols, for the highways were far from safe, and we wot not what awaited us at our journey's end. The fine spring morning told on our spirits and we were in good humour. Conversation, mingled with laugh and jest, flowed fast, and one would have imagined we were setting out for a holiday rather than on an expedition on which fortune, nay life and death, depended.

At the summit of Portsdown we halted to look back upon the good old seaport once more, then we cantered easily down the long slope to the village of Purbrook. Then came the steady climb through the Forest of Bere, where memories of a journey seven years before rose before my mind.

At Butser we reined our horses while I pointed out the scene of my encounter with the three Dorset smugglers. Then we reached the lofty summit of the road, from which the magnificent view of the valley of the Rother could be seen under its fairest conditions.

At Petersfield we stopped for our midday meal, and after giving our horses a well-earned rest, we resumed our way northward till the bold headline of Hindhead loomed up in front of us.

At Rake we stopped to visit the scenes of old associations, calling in at the "Flying Bull", where Giles Perrin, now grey-haired, bent, and decrepit, still followed his calling.

"Lord ha' mercy on me if 'tis not young Master Wentworth!" he exclaimed, showing that, though grown in stature, I had not outgrown the appearance of my boyhood; and when Drake told him of my newly found title, the old man tottered away to let the frequenters of the inn know the news; whereat we, unwilling to tarry longer, pushed on towards the towering heights of Hindhead.

Presently we crossed a heath beyond which we could perceive the village of Liphook. In the distance we could make out a crowd of people whose infuriated shouts were plainly audible.

"Come on, lads, let's see what this uproar means!" shouted Felgate, and, setting spur to our steeds, we soon covered the distance that lay between us and the howling mob.

The cause of the tumult was soon plain. At the outskirts of the village was a small stagnant pond, by the side of which was erected a post with a swinging beam. At one end of the beam was a rough chair in which was bound a miserable old woman of repulsive appearance, whose face bore a look of mute despair. Around her the crowd surged, yelling: "Duck her! Duck the witch!" while eggs and filth were thrown with no uncertain aim at the unhappy specimen of humanity whom the mob had seen fit to bait.

As we approached, the crowd, too intent to notice our coming, had seized the beam and were swinging it over the pond with the object of immersing the occupant of the ducking stool.

We reined in for a moment to take counsel amongst ourselves.

"Rescue her by all means," said Felgate.

"But she is a witch; beware of the evil eye," demurred Drake, who, like all West-countrymen, deeply believed in witchcraft and sorcery, far more so than dwellers in other parts of England.

"Witch or no witch, she is a woman," retorted Felgate, "and it behoves all true gentlemen to protect a woman in danger."

With that we spurred forward and reached the outskirts of the crowd just as the great beam was being slowly lowered into the water.

"Hold!" shouted Felgate authoritatively, forcing his horse into the press. The mob gave way, still shouting fierce imprecations against the terrified old woman, and making hostile demonstrations against the interrupters of their fiendish sport.

"Who is responsible for this conventicle?" he continued, urging his horse towards the ducking stool.

"I am, worthy sir," replied a short, stout man with heavy, beetling brows, who stood his ground doggedly.

"And who are you, sirrah?" demanded Felgate, giving him a fierce look that cowed him for the time. "And where is your warrant for this deed?"

"By virtue of the act passed in the reign of His Majesty King James the First, of blessed memory, concerning the punishment of sorcerers, witches, warlocks, and the like."

"Tut, tut, man, the statute is dead! Have you a magistrate's warrant, Form 226, giving you authority for this? Quick, answer me! I am a King's officer, so on your peril speak truly!"

The man shook his head.

"Then let her go free!"

Here the mob redoubled its cries, and a few missiles came hurtling through the air towards us.

"Draw, comrades, draw!" shouted Felgate, and, unsheathing our swords, we urged our horses through the crowd till we reined up abreast of our chivalrous friend.

"Would ye have 'em take a witch out of your hands?" cried the officious man, appealing to the crowd.

"No! No! Down with them, and death to the witch!" came like a hoarse roar from the excited crowd.

"Ay, ay, down with them!" repeated their incautious leader, seizing Felgate's horse by the bridle and attempting to force it on its haunches.

His ill-advised action soon earned its reward, for Felgate struck him a heavy blow with the hilt of his sword, then, clutching at him as he fell, he backed his horse through the crowd till he reached the edge of the pond. Then with a mighty effort he flung the man into the slimy water, where he fell with a heavy splash. A moment later he reappeared, clambered to the bank, and made his way towards the village, cursing us at the top of his voice.

But the danger was not yet over, for the mob showed signs of a combined and active resistance. Fortunately we were together by the side of the pool, so

that none of our attackers could get behind us.

"Draw your pistols and fire at the first man who steps forward!" said Felgate, loud enough for all to hear him.

At the sight of six levelled weapons the crowd drew back; then, satisfied that the cowards were properly cowed, Felgate jumped from his horse, made his way to the ducking stool, and cut the bonds that held the old crone to the chair.

Baulked of their prey, the mob still surged round us, and with a shout of: "Let 'em have the cat!" a great black object was sent flying towards us, and, striking my horse on the crupper, resolved itself into an enormous black cat, that spat and howled, digging its claws into the horse's hide, and arching its back like the demon cat that is the reputed companion of every witch.

A word from the old woman caused the animal to jump towards her, and, climbing on her shoulders, it mewed and purred with a fearsome delight.

Lifting the beldam to his horse, Felgate placed her pillionwise behind him. We closed in on either side, and, forcing our way through the mob, our pistols still pointed ominously at them, we gained the highroad once more, and trotted unmolested through the village of Liphook.

Now that the danger was past, Drake and I could not help laughing at our cavalier companion and his fair burden, for the hag had clasped him tightly round the waist with her skinny arms, while the cat, perched on her shoulders, was rubbing its head against the back of Felgate's plumed hat, so that it was being continually thrust over his eyes despite his frequent attempts to place it firmly on his head.

"How far do you journey with your gentle burden?" quoth Greville.

"Bless me for a landlubber if I thought of it at all!" replied Felgate. "Say, mistress, where shall we set you down?"

"At the top of the Devil's Punch Bowl, if it pleases you, sir," replied the old woman in a quavering voice, "for then I shall be safe."

"'Tis a big request, Felgate," I remarked, knowing that the summit of Hindhead, close to which the Bowl is situated, was a good six miles off, and an uphill road the whole way.

"Never mind; a good deed but half done is a sorry performance." And with this we set spurs to our horses and trotted briskly up the long slope that led to the towering heights that showed clearly before us.

Although I had oft journeyed across this bleak hill, never before had I seen it under such depressing circumstances. The sun had long vanished behind a bank of dark-grey, undefined clouds, while a cold wind howled across our path, moaning through the treetops and raising clouds of choking dust on the sun-dried highway.

Just as we reached the summit, where the road makes a vast horseshoe curve round the dark, forbidding cavity known as the Devil's Punch Bowl, a heavy rain-

storm came on, blotting out the horizon, while a vivid flash of lightning, followed at a short interval by a tremendous clap of thunder, startled our horses, and, be it confessed, ourselves as well.

"Thunder in April! And in company with a witch! This smacks of His Satanic Majesty with a vengeance!" muttered Drake, drawing closer to me.

"Set me down here, sir," whined the hag, and Felgate having done so, she turned towards us.

"I have not far to go now--my home is down there," indicating with a skinny finger the rain-blotted heathery pit beneath us.

"And now," she continued, "take an old dame's blessing for your kindness in helping the helpless, and may success reward your search."

"Our search?" exclaimed Greville, astonished at her words.

"Ay, your search," mumbled the old crone.

"And shall we succeed?" I asked.

"Not till the waters run dry!" she replied mysteriously, and with that another flash of lightning left us blinking in semi-darkness. When we looked round the witch had gone. A moment later we saw her making her way with great agility down the steep slope of the Bowl, till she disappeared from our view behind a large clump of heather and gorse.

"Well, I'm----," and here Felgate broke off for want of a word to express his surprise.

"How did she know we were on a treasure hunt?"

"That's more than I can tell," replied Drake, and drawing our cloaks tighter around our shivering bodies, we rode down the hill, silent and depressed, through the driving rain, towards the town of Godalming.

CHAPTER XX--What we Heard and Saw at Holwick.

The rest of our journey northward passed almost without incident. The day after our arrival at Godalming we rode quickly through Guildford to London, where

we tarried no longer than we could possibly help, staying that night in the village of Highgate.

Four days later, following the seemingly endless Great North Road, we arrived at the village of Bawtry, from which it is said most of our New England colonists had come. This place is just over the Yorkshire border, and to our unaccustomed ears the broad dialect seemed almost a foreign tongue.

Here we stayed the night, intending to make an early start, so as to be at Holwick before sunset. An old farmer advised us to go by Thorne rather than by Doncaster, and, taking his advice, we rode over a fairly level road, which in three hours brought us in sight of the former place.

Here we followed a broad, sluggish river, whereon lay many broad-bottomed craft not unlike those we had seen on the inland waters of the Dutch Republic. This river they call the Don. When we left it we crossed another--the Aire--at a place called Snaith.

We were now but a few miles from our destination, and our hopes and fears ran high. At Carleton we left the main road, and after a few miles of a narrow winding lane the gaunt tower of Holwick rose before us.

The village was a straggling one, consisting of a few stone cottages, an indifferent inn, and a small church, its square tower, blackened by fire, a silent witness to a long-forgotten Scottish raid. From its lead-covered summit Old Noll himself had directed the attack upon my father's stronghold.

Poverty, through manorial neglect, was only too apparent, and I could not help exclaiming despondently: "Look, friends! What a heritage, and hardly a scrap of paper to prove my right to it!"

We halted at the old inn, and enquired in a seemingly casual tone whether we could be accommodated there. "For," quoth Felgate to the servile landlord, "we have a desire to know more of this old castle, and methinks that good fishing is obtainable in this stream."

"Eh, my masters," replied he, "'tis not to be beaten in all Yorkshire for good sport--trout, dace, chub, and even the lordly salmon; and as for t'old castle--well, 'tis said that spooks be about. Leastwise I never care to go yonder missen, for strange noises affright the whole countryside!"

"Oh!" I ejaculated. "And is that so?"

"Ay, young sir. With the disappearance of Sir Owen, the owner of Holwick, after the taking of the castle some two-and-twenty years ago by the malignants--and a curse be on 'em all--Sir Owen was last seen fighting his way through the rebel foot. They say he was killed, and his body buried in the dry moat by the rebels; and ever since that time we often hear most fearsome cries and noises."

When we had arranged for a few days' stay, a serving man led our horses away, and we entered the best room of the place. It was an oak-panelled, wain-

scoted room, with a low, smoke-grimed ceiling that was traversed by a massive beam. The floor was paved with large stones, while an ingle nook and settle imparted a cheerful aspect to the apartment. But what attracted my attention most was a mattock and a couple of spades, with the rich red clay still sticking to them, lying in a corner of the room.

"Is our host a gravedigger as well as an innkeeper?" asked Drake, his eye following the glance I gave at the implements.

"Nay, Greville, it means that we are forestalled; someone is already at work here."

"Who?"

"I'll wager 'tis none other than that villain Increase Joyce."

"Ho, landlord!" shouted Felgate, in a voice that sounded like the bellowing of a bull.

Our host soon appeared, cringing and bowing like the menial that he was.

"Where is the man that uses these things?" I demanded, pointing to the spades and mattock.

Our host, taken aback, stammered some inaudible reply.

"Speak up, man!" I commanded sternly.

"'Tis but a king's officer making a survey of the castle."

"King's officer, forsooth! Now, listen! As you value your hide, answer truly. We are king's officers; he is an arrant rogue and villain. For aught I know you may be his accomplice. Now, where is he?"

"He rode off this morning to Selby."

"And he returns----?"

"Sir, I know not--on my honour!"

Whether the man lied or not I could not tell. His crafty face was expressionless.

"Now, listen, sirrah! Say not one word that we are here, but directly he returns let us know. Fail us, or play us false, and you'll answer to the king's justices at York."

The landlord, thoroughly cowed, promised compliance, and we withdrew to a remote room to await events.

Twilight was drawing in as the sound of horse's hoofs was heard on the hard road. We made our way to a window where we could overlook the front of the inn, and the horseman proved without doubt to be the rogue Joyce, though he was arrayed more gaily than of yore, and a close-trimmed beard hid the lower part of his face.

The landlord took his horse to the stables where ours were kept, and Joyce made to follow, but with some inaudible remark the former succeeded in inducing the villain to enter the house.

In a few minutes we heard him calling for food and drink, and the clattering of knives and platters showed that he was appeasing his appetite with zest.

It was a pitch-dark night; a keen easterly wind whistled through the trees, while rain-laden, murky, ill-defined clouds drifted across the sky.

"Hist!" whispered Felgate, laying his hand on my arm.

Cautiously out of the doorway crept the figure of a man, his form muffled in a dark cloak, while a broad-brimmed hat was pulled down over his face. In his hand he carried a horn lantern, while the jangle of steel showed that the spades were to be brought to work. It was Increase Joyce.

With a stealthy tread he vanished down the road, hugging the buildings as if fearful of meeting a benighted stranger in the now deserted village.

Without a word we buckled on our swords and left the inn, following carefully in his track, pausing ever and anon to try and detect the sound of his footsteps.

At length we came to the confines of the castle grounds, where a thick belt of trees added to the already overpowering darkness. Groping blindly forward, stumbling over roots and colliding with unseen trunks of trees, we continued our quest, fearful lest the crackling of a dry twig or the clanking of our weapons should betray our whereabouts.

Just as we reached the far side of the wood the sudden gleam of a lantern being lit arrested us. Simultaneously we dropped on the dew-sodden grass and awaited further developments.

The ghostly light of the lantern flickered upon the grey walls of the tower, casting the long shadow of the man upon it in grotesque shapes. For a moment Joyce paused, then, turning towards us, began to walk, counting the paces as he went. At the thirty-second he set the lantern down, and, plying his spade with great vigour, sent the soil in all directions, some of the dirt falling close to us.

For over an hour he delved, till his laboured breathing showed how great his efforts were. Five feet down he dug, till the heap of soil hid him from us.

"Now!" whispered Felgate, laying his hand on his swordhilt.

"Nay! He has found naught. Let him enjoy his disappointment for a while."

Muttering curses at his want of success, Joyce dragged himself out of the pit and walked towards the castle, leaving the lantern on the ground. Then he began to pace afresh, but in a different direction, till his form was lost in the darkness.

For a while no sound save the occasional hoot of an owl and the rapidly dying breeze broke the stillness as we waited for some signs of the renewed efforts of the treasure seeker.

Suddenly a hideous cry, so terrifying that it caused the blood to freeze in our veins, echoed through the silence of the night. Accustomed though we were to scenes of bloodshed and violence, this weird outburst, the concentrated expres-

sion of mortal agony, held us spellbound.

Drake was the first to recover himself, and, springing to his feet with a shout, he drew his sword and dashed across the open space of grass, while we followed close at his heels.

Stopping but for a moment to possess himself of the lantern, he made his way in the direction from which the sound had come.

Something compelled him to halt, and we stopped too. At our feet flowed the stream, its weed-encumbered waters looking black and forbidding in the dim light of the lantern, as with silent eddies it swirled between the steep rush-lined banks.

"Aubrey, that man is beyond your vengeance; a Higher Power has claimed him," exclaimed Greville, pointing with his weapon at a dark object that, arrested by a dense growth of weeds, floated in the centre of the stream. It was the hat of the doomed man, but not a bubble marked the spot where he had sunk.

In the presence of Death, that great leveller of rank and persons, we removed our hats and stood in silence, our eyes riveted on the spot under which the remains of my mortal enemy lay hidden from our view.

Then, extinguishing the lantern, we made our way through the wood, regained the road, and returned to the inn.

CHAPTER XXI--Our Search for the Treasure

The excitement of the previous night banished sleep from our eyes, and rising betimes we formed our plans for the day's work. Now that Joyce had gone to his last account there was no longer need for caution or concealment of our plans, and to the utmost astonishment of the crafty host of the Wentworth Inn, I was presented to him as the rightful lord of Holwick.

We thereupon breakfasted, and then made our way to the castle grounds. Viewed by daylight the whole scene was changed. The grey old tower, blackened by powder and fire, was so badly damaged as to be useless as a place of abode, little tendrils of ivy already serving to clothe the ruin with a kindly garb. The

stream that looked so black in the darkness now glittered in the warm sunlight, as if unmindful of the tragedy that had been enacted but a few hours before.

A careful search amid the dense masses of weed failed to give any clue to the mysterious disappearance of the double-dyed villain, so we concluded that his body must have escaped the tenacious grip of the thick vegetable growth.

On all sides rose little mounds of excavated earth, showing how vigorously Joyce had pursued his quest for the hidden treasure, each mound being thirty-two paces from the wall.

"Now, Aubrey, let's to work," exclaimed Felgate, throwing off his cloak and vest and rolling up his sleeves in a manner that showed his enthusiasm.

"Here, take the document and apply the directions to the actual place," I remarked. "This is the west side; yonder are two tall fir trees. Now, measure off thirty-two paces."

Felgate commenced to do so, Drake following at his heels.

"... Twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty---- Ha!"

For the thirtieth pace had brought him to the edge of the stream, and the thirty-second would be as near as anything right in the centre of the river bed.

For a moment we stood aghast. Surely there must be some mistake! Then Drake, slapping me soundly on the back, exclaimed in excited tones: "Bethink thee, Aubrey, the old hag's words: 'Till the waters run dry'!"

"And what of that?" I replied, dull of comprehension.

"Simply that the treasure lies in the bed of the stream. We must divert its course and the hiding place will be revealed."

"Let me try," exclaimed the impetuous Felgate, and in spite of our protests he waded into the water, which seemingly rose no higher than his knees.

At the third step he suddenly lurched forward, threw out his arms in a frantic effort to regain his balance, then disappeared beneath the surface.

The next instant he reappeared; but though he kept his head above the water, his legs were held by the weeds, and a look of horror overspread his face when he realized the danger of his position.

Had we not been there, his fate would have been sealed; but, cautiously wading in, Drake holding my left hand, I extended my right arm towards him.

I grasped him with a great effort, and we dragged him out of the hole, his jack boot being wrenched from his foot by the unrelenting grip of the tendrils.

"You are right, Drake," he panted. "There's a deep hole there, and the treasure lies in it."

"Come, then, at once," said Drake, "to the village, and enrol every man who can use mattock and spade. We'll have a channel cut here" (indicating a semicircle of about forty yards in diameter), "and dam the stream on each side of this hole."

There was no need to go as far as the village. Already the strange tidings

had spread, and a motley throng of villagers were gathered around the entrance to the estate, curious, yet loath to come nearer.

They raised a cheer at our approach, and when we told them of our wants there was a general stampede on the part of the men folk for digging implements.

While we awaited their return, a man having the air of petty authority stepped up to us and, addressing me, said:

"You are Sir Aubrey Wentworth, I am told."

I assented, and at the same time asked the fellow his business.

"In me you see the lawful representative of the sheriff of York. Before you delve, or take possession of, any portion of this land, I must have his authority. For aught I know, saving your presence, ye may be adventurers of low degree, outlaws, or the like."

"And where is your authority?" I demanded, wroth at being interfered with on my own land.

For answer he pulled a parchment from his pouch and held it up for my inspection.

"And have you any proof, sir, that you are lord of Holwick?" he continued.

Save for a few papers relating to the finding of the treasure I had none; even the title deeds, though close at hand, were not to be produced till the stream had been diverted; so I shook my head. Surely it was a pretty pass--a knight without a scrap of script to prove himself such!

"Then, till you get authority from the sheriff I cannot allow you to tarry here," said the bailiff in a deferential yet decisive tone.

"Then there remains but for me to journey to York," I replied. "How far lies the city?"

"One hour's ride by Fulford will bring you to Walmgate Bar. The sheriff, methinks, will be found at Clifford's Tower."

Ten minutes later Drake and I were spurring hotly towards York, Felgate, by reason of having but one jack boot and wet clothes, being compelled to stay behind, and before long the massive towers of the Minster showed above the sky-line.

So strong was our pace that in less than the hour our horses' hoofs clattered under the archway of the Bar.

On our being ushered into the presence of the sheriff, that worthy, a man of fierce and resolute aspect, curtly demanded our business.

"Sir Aubrey Wentworth, forsooth," he cried, "and not a word in writing to prove your right! Nay, good sirs, I cannot grant you your desires on so weighty a matter with so light a claim. A person of repute must identify you."

"But I know no man in the whole of Yorkshire!" I exclaimed, feeling the hopelessness of my position.

"Then authority must be obtained from the King's Court at St. James's. I can say no more to you, Sir Aubrey, so I wish you good-day."

His manner showed that the interview had ended, and, sick at heart, I left his presence, Drake offering me wasted yet well-meaning consolation.

We walked slowly towards Petergate, where our steeds had been stabled. As we turned into that street an officer came swiftly round the corner, so that we ran violently against each other. In a moment I recognized him; he was none other than Ralph Slingsby, who brought the tidings of the Restoration to us at the "Flying Bull" at Rake on the same evening that my father was murdered.

"Ah, Captain Slingsby!" I exclaimed.

He eyed me with astonishment.

"I know you not, young sir, and as for the captain, that is but a bygone handle to my name, for I am Colonel Ralph Slingsby at your service."

Briefly I recalled the scene in the "Flying Bull".

"Then you are Sir Owen Wentworth's son?" he asked.

I assented, and told him briefly of what had happened.

"Back with me to the sheriff's house," he said. "It would ill repay the friendship I owed your father if I did not render this slight service to his son. Young sir, I see now that you are the very image of your father when first I knew him."

With Slingsby to aid us, the interview with the sheriff was of short duration, and, armed with a warrant, I left his presence in a far better mood than I was in an hour before.

Shaking the colonel warmly by the hand, I bade him farewell, promising to call upon him directly my affairs were settled, and, mounting our horses, Drake and I sped joyfully back towards Holwick, which we reached within four hours of our departure.

For the rest of the day our army of workers toiled at their arduous task, and before nightfall a cutting was made sufficiently wide and deep to divert the stream.

Next morning the men commenced to construct the two dams, and so well did they labour that by noon the river was diverted, and only a pool of water covered the mysterious hole where we supposed the treasure was lying.

Then came the difficulty of getting rid of the water and emptying the cavity in the old bed of the river. Pumps were procured, yet the progress was slow, and as the sun sank to rest the bed was dry, though a pool of dark water showed clearly the position of the hiding place.

"Why did Sir Owen go to that extreme trouble?" remarked Drake, as we were returning to the inn. "Surely he could have deposited the treasure and the papers with Master Whitehead?"

"I cannot tell," I replied, "except, perhaps, that his faith in lawyers was none

too strong."

"Then he was like my sire," rejoined Felgate, laughing. "For he used to say: 'Show me a lawyer and I'll show you a thief!'"

Early next morning the work of pumping was resumed, and as the water sank slowly down the mouth of the cavity, a dark object showed amidst the lank weeds. One of the men pounced upon it, cut the restraining tendrils, and held the object up for our inspection. It was Felgate's jack boot.

Before noon the pumps sucked dry; the hole was emptied of water. A ladder was thrust down, and found a firm bottom at about fifteen feet. Armed with lanterns, Felgate and I prepared to descend, and, having fastened a rope round our waists, we commenced carefully to climb down the ladder.

By the fitful glimmer of the candles we could see that we were in a vaulted chamber, the roof of which had caved in, forming the aperture through which we had descended. Apparently it had at one time been a subterranean passage between the castle and the village, but walls had been built, converting it into a small chamber of about twenty feet in length and six in breadth.

The floor was slimy with mud, and when our eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness we perceived an object lying close to our feet. Felgate stooped and flashed the lantern on it. It was the body of Increase Joyce, his features drawn horribly in his death struggles!

We shouted for another rope to be let down, and, tying it round the limp, lifeless form, we gave the signal, and the body of the unfortunate ruffian was drawn up to the light of day.

Another object met our gaze; it was the skeleton of a man encased in armour that showed him to have been a Roundhead. He must have perished during the attack on the castle, for his heavy broadsword was found by his side.

"Send a man down with a spade," called Felgate to those above, and presently a man came down the ladder, followed by Drake. In less than an hour the mud was heaped in one corner of the vault, laying bare a hard, roughly paved floor. Still there was no sign of the much-sought-for prize.

The damp, unhealthy atmosphere made our heads swim, so for a time the work was suspended and we gained the upper air, where a crowd of morbid countrymen were dividing their attention between the corpse of the unfortunate Increase Joyce and the gaping hole from which we had emerged.

A rest of half an hour revived us, and we returned to the attack with feverish anxiety.

"Three feet down and we'll come across it right enough," said Drake, and lustily two stout countrymen plied their tools.

The cobbles, set in cement, were like an iron plate, but once these were removed the work of digging a hole became easy. As the depth increased our

excitement rose, till at length one of the mattocks struck something that emitted a metallic sound. It was a heavy iron chest.

When laid bare, the box was about three feet in length, about two feet in breadth, and a foot and a half in depth. Two handles, rusted with age, were sufficiently strong to enable the chest to be hoisted by means of a stout rope, and with a shout of suppressed excitement from the crowd the precious box was hauled up and deposited on the grass.

[image]

THE CHEST IS HOISTED TO THE SURFACE

As we had no keys a cold chisel was required, but, this not being forthcoming, a man was dispatched to the village to procure one.

While we were waiting, the bailiff, who was now most civil and obliging, placed in my hands an object that had been found in Joyce's pocket. It was the long-lost metal box which my father had mentioned in his will, but its contents were simply two pieces of faded and much-handled paper containing one-third of the mysterious directions that had so puzzled the murderer and would-be thief.

On the messenger's return we used the cold chisel to such good purpose that the massive lid flew open with a clang and a groan, disclosing a number of canvas sacks filled with coins of all sorts. Underneath were a few pieces of silver-plate, such as had not been melted down for the use of His Late Majesty King Charles, the martyr, while at the bottom of the chest was a package carefully protected by a covering of oiled silk.

Tearing open the covering, I found all the documentary evidence that was required to prove my right to the Manor of Holwick--the cup of joy was filled to overflowing, and, in spite of my surroundings, I sought relief in a flood of tears.

————

Concerning the events that marked the close of the strange history of my father's will there is but little to write.

The contents of the treasure chest were sufficient for me to restore the Manor of Holwick to its former greatness. The castle still stands, a venerable ruin, but a small yet stately mansion, designed by the great Wren himself, occupies a commanding position within a mile of the shattered remains of our ancestral hall.

Still the years roll on. The Merrie Monarch was succeeded by his brother James, whose ill-advised acts alienated his subjects. William and Mary then

reigned, William being succeeded by his wife's sister, good Queen Anne, whom God preserve. All these monarchs I have actively served; and when the call of duty has not taken me to the high seas, or on service in some foreign land, my leisure time has always been spent in the quietness of Holwick.

One by one the friends of my youth have gone. None have I grieved for more than for Felgate when I learned of his glorious death in the moment of victory at the battle of La Hogue. Greville Drake still remains my tried and trusted companion, and our greatest pleasure during our frequent meetings is to talk of the many adventures of our youth in the days of the Merrie Monarch.

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